



KAYAKING THE SEA CAVES OF SANTA CRUZ ISLAND

by Norm Knutson

After three days of scuba diving a few of the Channel Islands, we wanted to continue the exploring and adventure so some of us spent an extra night in Ventura so we could go kayaking the following day on Santa Cruz Island.

Because we were going to spend a good deal of the day on a kayak, we were hoping for overcast skies. And the weather gods delivered the overcast sky until we reached Scorpion Anchorage on Santa Cruz Island when the sun decided to come out.

On Aug. 18, 2004, Maria Misthos, Pam Radkey, Jim Vallario, Ray Will and myself pushed off from the beach and started exploring the caves and tunnels on the island.

Some were tricky as we had to time it so we would not get pushed against the rocks or hit a submerged rock, which might tip us over. We explored a huge offshore rock that had a couple of tunnels, in which one was named "ooh-aah". After an hour of exploring it was off for some lunch and drinks and then we went the other way towards Cavern Pt. where there were more tunnels and caves to



Picture Courtesy of Chuck Graham, Paddler Magazin, 2000

explore. We noticed a bad smell (yes, we took showers that morning) coming from what looked like a dead harbor seal that was bloated from being dead for a while.

In one cave, Ray hit a submerged rock and tipped his kayak and dumped him. After getting back on, his paddle was nowhere to be seen. Jim and I went further into the dark cave, thinking the current took it further in. This cave must have been at least over 200 ft. into the island. We could not find the paddle but then Pam found it not far from where Ray went over. Just goes to prove, men can't find anything. It usually takes a woman to find anything important.

The topography of the island was interesting to look at and the contrasts between the different colors of the water to the different colors of the island was quite special. It felt great to be alive and just being out there. On the way back to our beach, Ray's special knack of finding submerged rocks dumped him again. He seemed to be

enjoying the refreshing dip however. It was a great day and I highly recommend this to anyone looking for something different to do.

Island Kayaking rents kayaks for \$24 a day and they load and unload the kayaks and provide paddle, helmet and flotation vest. Island Packers will take you to the islands. Search the web for these two companies for more info.

FINALLY, SOME GOOD NEWS FROM THE ENTERTAINMENT CZAR - Kenneth Gwin

After a number of false starts and some other issues, we finally have great plans for this month's meeting and some really, really good entertainment.

Gordon Robinson is with our friends, the Marin Scuba Club, and is also one of my deep diving buddies (along with Marcos and Curtis). Incidentally, he was also part of the exciting Nautilus Explorer trip to Alaska, British Columbia, etc., club members Pierre and Gerda were raving about last summer.

He takes pictures and has proof of many great adventures ... I've left it up to him to choose the subject matter ... Cold water, tropical, whatever--it should be interesting.

So, sometimes entertainment can be a great reunion with someone already familiar to a few members of the club, and so, can be an opportunity for some of us to hog the conversation, retell old tales, make up some new ones, and plan for some future escapade and leave the rest of you out of the conversation.

We'll try not to do that. (Pierre? Pierre?)

See you on the 15th.

Der Stammtisch



The Channel Islands trip was great, as usual. This was my fourth time on the Peace and I liked it as much as the first time. Deborah was once again in the galley keeping us all from wasting away. She had apparently been warned about my violent allergic reaction to tofu and as far as I can tell, had banished the loathsome soy byproduct from the boat.

Shortly before our heading south from Baghdad by the Bay, I had been given a mysterious package to deliver to Deborah. In the early evening before our departure, with the sun having slipped below Twin Peaks, Ken had dropped by the house with a small tightly wrapped and slightly grease-stained bundle tucked under his arm. I knew there was something amiss when he appeared at my door dressed completely in black, this was obviously no fashion statement, he was on a mission. I hadn't heard his truck, apparently he'd coasted down the hill with the lights off, his license plate was covered with mud or wrapped in a rag, I couldn't tell, but the numbers were illegible. From his watch cap down to his "Chuck Taylor" sneakers, the white tips of which had been covered over with a black felt tipped marker, he was the man in black. He sat quietly in the cab of his truck and gave three short flashes from his Halcyon Pioneer light, he moved to my door, quickly, head down and rasped for me to turn off the "damn porch light, they might see me." In the quite gathering darkness, he looked over his shoulder and then deftly thrust a package into my hands, hidden away in a folded copy of the Bay Guardian. "Give this to Deb, she'll know what to do." Then he was gone, coasting down the street in his silent truck, lights and motor finally coughing to life after he had made the turn at the bottom of the hill.

I didn't tell Gerda, no use getting her as nervous as I was, I don't know what made me do it, loyalty to Ken or the adrenalin rush of excitement, knowing that if we were discovered there would be no turning back.

Continue on page 3

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REEFER RAP 2004

<p>JANUARY</p> <p>01 - New Year's Day - Point Lobos 07 - Officer's Meeting 10 - Cypress Sea 21 - Meeting - Sinbad's 24- Monterey Beach Dive</p>	<p>FEBRUARY</p> <p>04 - Officer's Meeting 07 - Cypress Sea - (3 Dives) 18 - Meeting - Sinbad's</p>	<p>MARCH</p> <p>03 - Officer's Meeting 17 - Meeting - Sinbad's 20 - Cypress Sea - (3 Dives)</p>
<p>APRIL</p> <p>03 - Abalone Opener - Fort Ross 07 - Officer's Meeting 17 - Cypress Sea - (3 Dives) 21 - Meeting - Sinbad's</p>	<p>MAY</p> <p>05 - Officer's Meeting 19 - Meeting - Sinbad's 22 - 23 SCUBA SHOW 2004 22 - Cypress Sea - (3 Dives)</p>	<p>JUNE</p> <p>02 - Officer's Meeting 12 - Cypress Sea 16 - Meeting - Sinbad's 27 - Abalone Closer at Ocean Cove</p>
<p>JULY</p> <p>07 - Officer's Meeting 21 - Meeting - Sinbad's 24 - Cypress Sea - (3 Dives) - Sat.</p>	<p>AUGUST</p> <p>TBD - Abalone Opener - Salt Point 04 - Officer's Meeting 15-17 - Channel Islands 18 - Kayaking the Caves of Santa Cruz Island 18 - Meeting - Sinbad's 28 - Divers Day with Oakland A's</p>	<p>SEPTEMBER</p> <p>01 - Officer's Meeting 04 - Cypress Sea - (3 Dives) - Sat 10 - 12 - Lake Tahoe Dive - Norm Knutson 15 - Meeting - Sinbad's 18 - Monterey Underwater Clean-up - Debra Gilmore, divecleanup@yahoo.com / (510) 523-8401</p>
<p>OCTOBER</p> <p>01 -02 - San Diego, Lois Ann - Armin Luggen 415 479-3240 02 - Alcatraz swim/paddle - Tim invitational@south-end.org 06 - Officer's Meeting 09 - Cypress Sea - (3 Dives) - Sat. - Pierre - 415.285.6293 20 - Meeting - Sinbad's - Officer Nominations !!!</p>	<p>NOVEMBER</p> <p>03 - Officer's Meeting 17 - Meeting - Sinbad's - Officer Elections 20 - Cypress Sea - (3 Dives) - Sun. - Pierre - 415.285.6293 TBD - Abalone Closer</p>	<p>DECEMBER</p> <p>01 - Officer's Meeting 11 - Cypress Sea - (3 Dives) - Sat - Pierre - 415.285.6293 15 - Meeting - Sinbad's - Christmas Party</p>

IN MEMORIAM

Randy Fry
1954-2004

Think not disdainfully of death, but look on it with favor,
for even death is one of the things that nature wills.

Marcus Aurelius, Meditations

REPORT ON CHANNEL ISLANDS TRIP

By Jim Valerio



Picture Courtesy of Frank King

Day 1, San Clemente: Dive, Breakfast, Dive, Snack, Dive, Lunch, Dive, Snack, Dive, Dinner, Night Dive.

Day 2, Santa Catalina: Dive, Breakfast, Dive, Snack, Dive, Lunch, Dive, Snack, Dive, Dinner, Avalon.

Day 3, Anacapa: Dive, Breakfast, Dive, Snack, Dive, Lunch, Dive, Ventura.

Any questions?



Picture Courtesy of Frank King

EAVESDROPPING ON THE PEACE

by Gerda Hurter

Jim's succinct account of this year's Channel Island trip evoked unforgettable memories. Memories etched into the brain, memories of brilliant conversations on board the Peace, just like the following:

Bill: "Wow, did you see Norm down there on the last dive?"
Skip: He [redacted] sea hare [redacted] !!! Wild, man, it was [redacted] wild."

Pierre: "[redacted] safety sausage [redacted]..."

Norm: "I once asked "Skip" if he practiced safe diving, and he says all he ever carries is [redacted]. And you wonder why [redacted]."

Debra: "[redacted] [redacted] [redacted]!"

Skip: "Yeah, [redacted] better than that [redacted] but still I think that [redacted] right?"

Editor's note: to comply with the America Newsletter code of ethics & decency, portions of the dialogue have been expurgated.



Picture Courtesy of Frank King

SHOULDA, COULDA, WOULD A

By Jeffrey Lipsett

Yea, I shoulda signed up for the Channel Islands trip long before I decided to get on the waitlist (which did not materialize in a spot for me) but I didn't and feeling the need to get wet and a little bit jealous of you who did get to go I searched for a trip on my own. I got aboard a 4 day Southern Island trip aboard the Conception. As luck would

have it there were only 20 divers aboard - I had a double berth and a single for my gear! The weather was delightful, not too hot and the seas relatively flat, made for easy diving and boating. The diving was, in reality, just ok, viz was a dirty 30ft. Half of the boat was booked by Bluewater Diveshop in Sunnyvale, spearheaded by an affable Russian called Roman, whose entourage brought along sausage, cheese, dark bread, all sorts of pickled things and of course vodka which they mercifully and generously shared. The diveshop owner speared a yellowtail and shared some sashimi (tip: bring wasabi and you'll be a hero even if you don't fish!) The balance of the boat were Northcoast salts and their kids and a couple of DIR divers from SoCal. So should you miss "our" boat don't miss the boat take a chance and get wet.

Best in diving, Jeff

STAMMTISCH - from page 2

The captain of a ship wields amazing power, it's a throwback to an earlier era, and I knew how Eric would react to the package onboard his ship. I had an image of being keelhauled dancing in my head. Still, I had to do it, the two vacuum-sealed packages of cranberries, plus the olives, fresh, shimmering black plump ovals waiting to be eaten, I had to get them onboard, no matter the cost. The look on Deborah's face when she unwrapped the package and I knew it had been worth the risk, that and the tofu less galley. Still, Captain Eric, when he realized what had

Continue on page 5

Stammtisch – from page 4

happened, could be heard muttering, “It isn’t right, it just isn’t right” as he stomped towards the wheelhouse.

The diving itself was good, I woke up around 6:30 on Sunday to find us still sailing along, heading for San Clemente. Our first dive was at Windowpane, a pinnacle starting at 50 feet beneath the surface and continuing down to the sand at 200 feet. For our second day we had a change of venue and headed for Santa Catalina. We had great conditions at Farnsworth Bank, the anchor line disappearing into a shimmering bait-ball on the way down. The entire dive felt as if we had crashed some sort of fish convention. Later in the evening, instead of a second night dive we headed into Avalon for our customary wander about town. It will come as no surprise that the majority of our group and this includes our *compadres* from the Marin Skin Divers, ended up at The Marlin Club. It’s a good place to do some deco after a couple of grueling days of diving. I overheard at least one Marin diver commenting about our group, “do those Reef Divers do all the dives.” Well some did, as usual Jim took every opportunity to get into the water. The morning after the Marlin Club I noticed a marked decrease in the morning’s level of enthusiasm. I even had someone ask if I would mind eating my frosted mini-wheat’s outside, the crunching was apparently too loud. Our last day was spent at Anacapa. Two solid dives at Landing Cove, kelp, a good size swim-through and a torpedo ray with at least a five-foot wingspan kept us electrified. For an in-depth dive report see **Jim’s write-up on page 4**. We enjoyed a smooth sail back to

Ventura where we said our goodbyes and Gerda and I set out towards Riverside, in the heart of the Inland Empire. As has become my custom, I managed to leave some dive gear behind, this time it was our canister lights. Thanks to Tim and Jim for reuniting us.

Getting back to the topic of sneakers, if you’ve ever noticed, Ken is partial to black Converse sneakers, “Chuck Taylor’s” to be exact. Those of you, who went to high school in the days of mandatory gym classes and jock strap inspections, will probably remember these shoes. It was a simpler time in America; no one knew that someday kids would be mugged for their sneakers, let alone that they would cost more than my first car, a 61 two-tone crème and green VW Van (but that’s another story).

Chuck Taylor played basketball for the Akron Firestones, among other teams before he went to work for Converse in 1923, when the company was just four years old. In its heyday they controlled 80 percent of the athletic shoe market, largely because there really weren’t any other brands. All you had to decide was what color, black, very cool or white, “did your mom buy those for you? The other choice, was high tops, again very cool or low tops, see above. I remember my mom; “you want to spend almost six dollars on sneakers? They’re bad for your feet and the one’s they sell at Kmart only cost half that much.” Yea, I was one of those kids who wore the Kmart knockoffs, or worse, anyone remember the “Buck Tyler Converts?”

Well, Converse is still around, but it no longer says “Made in the U.S.A.” beneath the red star on

the heel and they don’t cost six bucks anymore and there’s the issue of color, they come in green, purple, and pink, for crying out loud, it’s just not right. It’s the nature of life; the only constant is change.

Talking about change, September lurks just around the corner, another busy month, but one that promises to be fun. I’m fond of September; first, it’s my birthday month. Then there’s the fact that it’s National Preparedness Month, certainly an improvement over last year’s, Food Safety Awareness Month. The name comes from the Latin *septem* or seven. In the Georgian calendar it became the ninth month. I guess innumeracy is nothing new.

Lots of interesting historical tidbits concerning events which took place in September, as well as being the birth month of some noteworthy characters. The first Labor Day was celebrated in September, I know, everyone else chose May, but that’s why we celebrate in September, fewer foreign tourists. The Treaty of Paris, which ended the American Revolutionary war, was signed on September 3, 1783 (those pesky French again). California became the 31st state on September 9, 1850. Who could forget that John “Black Jack” Pershing and H.L. Mencken were born on September 12 and 13 respectively. And T.S. Elliot, George Gershwin and Johnny Appleseed (John Chapman) all share my birthday, albeit they would, however, be a few years older than I am.

Reminds me of my recent trip to the DMV. It seems they will only renew your license so many

continue on page 6

Stammtisch – from page 5

times without checking to see if you can still find your way to their office and give witness that you are actually among the living. I had thought they would just use Photo Shop or the like and digitally enhance the image on my current license, slowly turning me into a Telly Savalas look-alike, without the lollypop of course. Anyway, after taking the vision exam, by the way, if you can't see the letters don't worry, they have translators; the lady behind the counter looked at me and asked, "Would you like to change any of your current information?" "Like what, I counter?" "Well, hair color or weight?" I'm not sure what she was on about, but I did make a slight adjustment. *A note to Ken, they don't do "silver gray mane".* I had to settle for the more prosaic "gray". We won't go into the weight, suffice it to say, it's no longer listed at 150 pounds and leave it at that.

Saturday, the 28th, Gerda and I rolled out of bed at O-dark-thirty and after a quick stop for a cup-a-Joe from Martha's, headed north towards Salt Point. After crossing the Golden Gate we pulled in at the new rest stop to watch the sun rise over the bridge. If you haven't been to the viewpoint before, it's been redone and looks terrific. There is a monument to the lone sailor, a young man with duffel at his feet looking out to sea. Around the statue there are plaques honoring those who passed under the Golden Gate, Marines, Coast Guard, Merchant Marines and



soldiers, some destined never to return to their homes, their last view, the Golden Gate.

We continued on having a great time driving along the coast, pulling into Gerstle Cove shortly before the appointed hour. Curt and Alicia pulled in moments later. The swells were up a bit so we sat on the bench and watched the pelicans fly over, seals surfing through the waves and discussed the state of the world. We did eventually enter the water, Gerda and I swam out through the pea soup watching the occasional fish that got close enough to be seen, visibility was fairly low in the cove. After a short swim we decided to bag the dive and spent some quality time lying on the beach emulating basking iguanas. Curt and Alicia were considerably more ambitious with their diving, discovering a swim through, laying out a reel and generally spending a long time beneath the blue green surface. A great day followed by a tasty barbeque afterwards.

This past Saturday found us once again aboard the Cypress Sea, sailing south to see what we could find. Gerda had scored a room the night before using *Priceline.com*. It really does work. We spent the night overlooking the golf course in a very quite room complete with a balcony. To gird ourselves for the rigors of the next days diving we checked out the Atkins diet, two slabs of rare prime rib with a Ventanna merlot to keep the beef company.



The following morning looked like a tech convention, stage bottles and doubles littered the dock a veritable obstacle course of dive gear. It turned out to be a great group to dive with. Our first stop was at Flintstones where we were treated to visibility of 80 to 100 feet (really, just ask) at 120 feet, no current and teeming fish. Gerda spotted a good-sized wolf eel in the open, calmly observing us as we admired him in return. On our way to our second site, Xcott made a hard circular turn came to a stop, and off our port side a pod of Orcas (saltwater wolves) swam by, spouting and having a ball. Suddenly they turned and headed straight towards the Cypress, they passed us off the stern within spitting distance, all four arching and spouting as if for our benefit.

Our second dive was at Fire rock annex. The visibility was not quite as good as Flintstones, but we had a fine time all the same, dropped down the anchor line to 90 feet or so and began a leisurely transect of the wall. Our final dive was at Eric's Pinnacle, a smallish pinnacle in about 60 feet of water, just perfect after our first two deeper dives.

There are still members out there that are missing out on some tremendous diving. Don't believe my reports, ask those who were aboard, I really am not exaggerating. To those who were onboard, Curt, Jim, Clyde, Loretta, Jörg, Gerda and I, we had a great time. Afterwards, we retired to the London Bridge Pub for a bit of off gassing and the all important electrolyte replenishment beverage of choice.

Continue on page 7

Stammtisch – from page 6

Looks as if I have just enough time to rinse my gear and pack up for the Tahoe trip, hope to see you there.

Don't forget the Monterey Beach clean-up, September 18. Until the next time, dive often, dive deep and don't forget to come back up.

DIVING INTO MYSTERY

By Kathy Brandt

When I decided to plunge into mystery writing, I knew what the “who, what, and where” of my novels would be. I've been a scuba diver for almost twenty years and have been sailing in the British Virgin Islands for ten. So my character, police diver and underwater investigator Hannah Sampson, was a natural. I published the first book in my underwater investigation series, *SWIMMING WITH THE DEAD*, in 2003, followed this year by *DARK WATER DIVE* (Signet/ \$5.99). My third book, *DANGEROUS DEPTHS* will be released in May 2005. How lucky could I get? I'm doing what I love and writing about it! And even better, the reviewers are calling the books “first rate thrillers, the underwater action top-notch.”

I've tried hard to keep the books authentic. I have dived the sites that my character, Hannah Sampson, dives when she sets out to solve heinous crimes, though I admit with relief that I have never encountered a dead body on a dive. Like me, Hannah finds wrecks dark, claustrophobic

places, where air tanks clanging off hulls serve to emphasize the fact that she is jailed by steel. She experiences the same fear that I do at depth, when nitrogen narcosis sends her to the edge of panic. I want the reader to feel what Hannah feels when she is caught in a wreck and out of air or swims right into the body of a murder victim.

I've also been awe struck in the underwater environment. Most of you know what I mean. It is like being submerged in Alice In Wonderland, gliding under arches blanketed in color, my bubbles catching and sparkling like mercury in the rocks above my head; swimming along underwater walls covered in reef life, the sea floor thousands of feet below. I've followed turtles and Manta Rays, played with sea lions, touched Christmas Tree Worms, and encountered Hammerheads that completely ignored my presence.

I want to share this wonder with those who have not experienced it and also let people know that the environment is fragile. As a result my books all have environmental sub-themes, focusing on the damage to coral reefs worldwide, on the decimation of shark populations for a bowl of shark fin soup, on endangered sea turtles.

When I started these books, I knew a respectable amount about the ocean environment and the basics of diving. But I knew absolutely

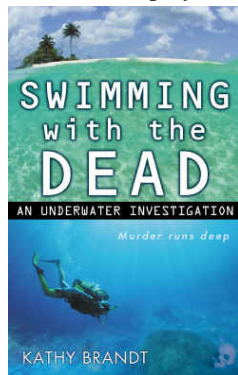
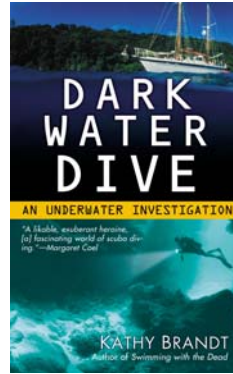
nothing about dive rescue and recovery, underwater investigation, or even some of the particulars about reef ecology or sea turtle preservation. I had a lot to learn.

I got certified in dry suits on a snowy day in a Colorado lake, elevation 10,500 feet. I've joined rescue and recovery divers for training both in the classroom and in water murky with sediment, where the diver swims blind. Those divers showed me the ropes—how to interview witnesses, find the last seen point, handle the radio, act as line tender, and develop search patterns.

I learned about evidence retrieval and preservation from the experts, people like Bob Teather who wrote the definitive book on underwater crime scene investigation. By the way, did you know that fingerprints, fibers, even blood can be recovered if the diver handles a weapon or body correctly underwater?

Recently, I accompanied a team of researchers in the Caribbean as they tagged turtles as part of a study that will hopefully provide enough data to change laws. I've spent hours in the dusty environmental library in the BVI and days at home buried in articles and research studies about the marine environment. Even that is fun, especially when it all gets turned into mystery.

Kathy Brandt is a mystery writer and a land locked diver, who lives in Colorado. To find out more, visit her website at: www.ksbrandt.com. Her books are available on line (www.Amazon.com and other sites) and in bookstores.



DIVE REPORT
8/28/04

By Curt Degler

Gerstle cove at Salt Point Sonoma County on Saturday had no red tide but it did have some persistent sea swells that gave the four members of my dive club (the SF Reef divers) who showed up pause to discuss world problems. Returning divers (there were about 15 OW students present) reported viz of 10ft inside the cove so we suited up and kicked out. My partner and I decided to explore the south reserve marker



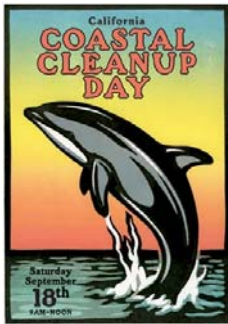
area so I deployed my new new OMS reel with the patented anti-fouling shield and we compassed our way through the surge and minestrone while I laid some test line. We found some big underwater structures with the usual suspects - giant lings hiding in deep holes waiting to steal the bait of rock-perched poaching line fishermen and then discovered a hitherto unknown swim-through. It reminded me, when I closed my eyes, of Little River because of the amount of water that was moving through it (the persistent swells...). Viz improved to about 20 ft here. Lots of big fat

sea urchins abounded due to the collapse of the world price for their supposedly revivifying gonads (a victim of Viagra?) which made the swim through especially tricky...

A great dive with superb topside scenery, no parking meters or clueless tourists and not a fast food outlet within 50 miles. Beats Monterey on some days!



and OMS makes a great reel!



Courtesy of Heal The Bay
(healthebay.org)

THE ANNUAL MONTEREY CLEAN-UP DIVE! - BBQ!! - PRIZES!!!

When: September 18, 2004
Where: Wharf II in Monterey (next to Del Monte Beach)
Time: 8:30 a.m. to 3 p.m.
Parking: Free until 3 p.m.
Land check in: 8:00 a.m.
Divers check in: 8:30 a.m. Dive at 9:30 a.m.

BBQ: 1:00 p.m. on beach
Prize Awards: 1:30 p.m.

What's needed: DIVERS to help clean up the Monterey Harbor & underwater environment
NON-DIVERS to help with shore activities, check-in, BBQ etc.
BOATERS & KAYAKERS to transport divers and/or trash

Contact: Debra Gilmore at divecleanup@yahoo.com / (510) 523-8401

Pre-Registration: Not necessary, but helpful for the planning, especially if you want to be fed

Sponsors: the Harbor Master of Monterey, the City of Monterey and the Northern Californian Diving Community
Organizers: San Francisco Reef Divers and the Central California Council of Diving Clubs Inc.

BELLA ITALIA! DIVING THE AMALFI COAST

by Loretta Lowe

You know you are a diving addict when you make your vacation plans based on the outside chance you might be able to sneak in a scuba dive. Two years ago, I ventured to Greece and was pleasantly surprised to find some opportunities to dive off the Cyclades islands. This summer, our European plans had us heading to the land of chianti, pasta and "la serenissima". In between historical studies of Florentine artists, the Roman Empire, the Pope's ceiling and reading Frances Mayes' romantic Tuscan travel tales, I plugged "scuba diving in Italy" into an internet search engine to see what I could find.

How did we ever travel before the internet? Without it I would never have discovered the wonderful diving along the Amalfi Coast in Southern Italy. The few operators in this area have limited advertising funds, so you may never see Italy as a dive destination in the big-name scuba mags or at the expensive industry trade-shows. After spending a few days in this magical place, I am convinced that the Italian Amalfi Coast will soon become one of those secret "hot spots" of experienced dive travelers. With plenty of exciting sites to see both above and below the water, it is an ideal location for those with non-diving spouses and others who like to mix both diving and land exploration.

This is the land of myths. The spectacular Amalfi Coast is on the west coast of Italy approximately three hours South of Rome and one hour South of

Naples. Charming towns are built on stunning, vertigo-inducing cliffs that rise out of the clear blue Mediterranean Sea. Greek mythology claims this the home of the Sirens, mythical Sea Nymphs who used hauntingly sweet singing to lure sailors to their death. (In Homer's Odyssey, Odysseus is warned by Circe that he will pass the Sirens' island. She tells him to plug his men's ears with wax so they can not hear the sirens songs and to have them tie him tightly to the mast so he may listen if he wants to experience their seduction).



"Come closer, famous Odysseus - Achaea's pride and glory-moor your ship on our coast so you can hear our song! Never has any sailor passed our shores in his black craft until he has heard the honeyed voices pouring from our lips, and once he hears to his heart's content sails on, a wiser man."

Another myth is that there is poor diving in the Mediterranean and that the fish have all disappeared. While that may have been true at one time - it certainly isn't true here. In 1997 the Italian Ministry of Environment decreed the Punta Campanella a Marine Preserve that set up protected areas along the coastline. With restrictions on fishing, anchorages and authorized guided diving, the marine park has an amazing amount of life. And, boy, are they serious about their Marine Park. Our 6-pack dive boat was stopped twice in one day. Once

by the Park Patrol in a zodiac boat and a second time by the Italian Coast Guard. Each time our dive master patiently brought out the authorization papers for them to scrutinize.

With the "gospel of Rick Steves" as our guide we picked the medieval town of Sorrento for a home base. On the Southern end of the Bay of Naples, with the Island of Capri and the dominant Mount Vesuvius added to the view - it was the ideal spot for a much needed vacation. Due to the exceptionally rocky and volcanic coastline, the waters are crystal clear with 100 foot plus visibility. (For a good look at this coastline, the movie *The Talented Mr. Ripley* was partially shot on location here)

Sorrento Diving Center operates a small dive shop conveniently located at the seaside boat harbor. Our group of tourist divers included myself, an English speaking couple from Holland who were on their honeymoon, and a young Italian from Poggia. The staff included three dive masters: Paulo, who brought along a video camera to get some footage for a promotional video he was working on; Steven a gorgeous bi-lingual Australian; and Francesco who did not speak any English but was very animated in his pre-dive briefings. Their attention to safety was admirable - with two divemasters, one leading the group and one following, plus the third staying on the boat to drive.

Our dives for the day focused on grotto diving. After about a 30 minute boat ride passing historic sites of Roman Ruins and Greek temples, hidden coves and

Continue on page 10

Bella Italia – from page 9

harbors and the romantic town of Positano we came to the Isle of Isca and our dive site *Scoglio Isca*. We descended about 40 feet to a scenic rocky reef. The water temperature was around 75 degrees - what I call Hawaiian water warm. You needed a wet suit, but not a hood. We swam through a beautiful and colorful underwater arch encrusted with soft corals as small colorful fish swam around us. Due to the calcarous nature of the Peninsula, the area has quite a few caves and rocky crevices. The Sorrento Dive Center provided each of us with good underwater lights to peek into crevices as we swam through one of the arches and surfaced inside the cavity of breathable airspace. An eerie, prehistoric site as you saw the dripping stalactites and alabastrine formations extend from the ceiling into the water. Soft corals grew on the submerged section. Oozing, is the best way I can describe the

walls and ceiling. It looked like something out of an Alien movie and contrasted sharply with the bright colors underwater and the stunning aqua blue of the underwater opening into the grotto.

After completely exploring the grotto, we exited and swam around along the rocky outcroppings and more underwater arches. Nudibranchs and tropical colorful fish kept us entertained. Poking my head into one crevice rewarded me with a huge quarter-sized eyeball of a giant octopus. About five kicks later, I got a glimpse of a medium sized moray eel darting back into his hole.

Our second dive was to another bigger grotto called *Giotto Zafiro* which looked like an interior lake. While we saw less fish life on this dive, but it was just as interesting and unique as the first dive. On the ride back, I had a nice chat with the Steve, the Australian divemaster, about the other dives

in the area. He is an experienced diver who has dived many spots throughout the world. He went on to enthusiastically tell about spectacular wall dives in the region and spoke of places where the fish funnel around you. After two years in Italy, it clearly still held his interest. While there are not ordinarily pelagic species in this area, there are enough corals and other marine life to keep the underwater photographer happy for days on end. Lionfish and sea horses are also common to the area. The small taste I had for the diving here has made me want to go back for more.

After some wonderful diving, a mid-afternoon siesta followed by the requisite Italian evening stroll (the *passaggiata*), a delectable pasta dinner, window shopping for regional goodies and making plans for the spending the next day visiting ancient Pompeii, it makes you slow down and realize how this really is La Dolce Vita.

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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/>.

SAN FRANCISCO REEF DIVERS
Reef Divers Times
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