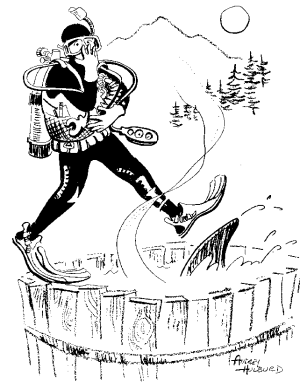


MARIN SCUBA CLUB NEWSLETTER

Volume 15 Number 11 November, 2008



PEACE NOW!

by Jeffrey Zankel

Crank up the hot tub and full speed ahead was the plan for the annual Marin Scuba Peace trip in August. Once again the club joined its SF cohorts, the Reef Divers, to share the beauty of the Channel islands on the Ventura based dive boat. After our traditional dinner on the pier at Milano's where we were joined by ex president Kushwara, we motored off to San Clemente Island with a full boat.

Dense fog over San Clemente greeted us on our first dive at Pyramid Cove.

We proceeded to pack in 5 more as the Navy informed us that the island would be bombed next day. Some on board were bombed well before that. Chef Joe regaled us with his culinary talents followed by the customary night dive. Dominos dominated the gaming tables as always.

The gate open announcement next morning found us at Ship Rock near Avalon. We were able to enjoy 100' plus vis for a couple of dives on this site. Ross and Wendy found a leopard shark lair as well as many octopi lurking about. We went in search of the giant sea bass at Italian Gardens but could only come up with a stray bat ray.

After another command performance by Chef Joe, the usual suspects slid into Avalon to sample the nightlife, such as it is. The rest were sentenced to dominos.

Tuesday dawned over Anacapa where we were able to get our last licks in before calling it a wrap. A good time was had by all.



The Risks of the Sea

by Mike Mohawk and Larry Clinton

Last year, seven of the nine people killed off the Sonoma and Mendocino coast had been abalone diving. The Santa Rosa Press Democrat reports that since 1987, 71 people have died while abalone hunting along the North Coast. So far this year, several deaths have been reported due to abalone hunting and/or scuba diving. Some fatalities were linked to heart conditions or other health problems, but two were attributed to trouble in kelp beds, due to unusually heavy kelp this year.

North Coast beaches are home to bull kelp, one of the world's fastest-growing and largest algae, which provide habitat for abalone.

Pete Raimondi, director of UC Santa Cruz's Long Marine Lab, told the Santa Rosa Press Democrat that the amount of growth and number of kelp varies from year to year, depending on the amount of nutrients in the water. He believes this year's kelp could be the thickest and strongest in decades. An upwelling of extra nutrients, likely created by cold water and stronger-than-normal winds,

have fed this year's growth, Raimondi said.

The seven North Coast abalone diving-related deaths this year already match the total number of deaths last year.

Diver Shaun Stratton of Chico told CYBER DIVER News Network: "When you throw yourself into the food chain. . . you lose your advantages. You can't just pull yourself out if you get in trouble." Or, as Hunter S. Thompson once put it,

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Holiday Party Dec. 13

Celebrate the season at our Annual Holiday Party on Saturday night, December 13 at Mike and Sharon Royce's home in Novato. Hang on to the enclosed flyer with driving directions, since this is the last newsletter of the year.

“Civilization ends at the waterline. Beyond that, we all enter the food chain, and not always at the top.”

Statistics indicate that abalone diving is more dangerous than some other activities commonly held to be risky.

Of roughly 40,000 licensed abalone divers, at least 23 have died since 2004 in Mendocino and Sonoma counties, according to official records and news reports.

“We deal with a lot of recreational activities — hunting, fishing — and abalone diving takes more lives than any of them,” said Sgt. Shannon Barney, deputy coroner of Mendocino County. “There’s a lot of ways to get in trouble.”

In addition to getting tangled in kelp, divers can be buffeted by strong waves that smash them against the rocks. In 2004, one ab diver was killed by a great white shark off the Mendocino coast. During extremely low tides, some rock pickers clamber into the rocky shallows to pluck the mollusks out of pools. Occasionally, one is swept out to sea by a wave.

All 14 abalone hunters who died in the last two years came from outside the North Coast area. Among them were three who died in Mendocino County over two days in April 2007, when the ocean was particularly rough. Blake Tallman, who runs Sub-Surface Progression Dive Shop in Fort Bragg, feels locals have an advantage because they can wait for good conditions. “The ocean is a lot more dangerous and unpredictable here than people think,” he said. “They definitely underestimate it.”

As we approach the end of the 2008 ab season, how can we prevent becoming another statistic? First, stick to the basics. Research each new perspective dive location to determine the local conditions and previous shark sightings. If it is known for sharks, pick another safer site, or wear a shark shield like Dave Buller’s. Secondly, plan your dive, dive with a buddy, let others know where you are diving, stay physically fit, know your limitations, and learn from those who have “been there – done that.”

Scott Taylor, store manager of Pinnacles Dive Center in Santa Rosa, says divers, even experienced ones, need to be extra aware of kelp and surges which change the structure of the canopy. He recommends divers “skirt the outside edges and enter into it. You would work around the outside edges and only venture so far into it as you were comfortable.”

One diver who had to rescue a dead buddy trapped in kelp suggested, “The best thing we could have done was to be within 10 feet of each other and have one guy dive and two guys watch.”

The Salt Point State Park website <http://saltpointoceanconditions.com> suggests: “Streamline your gear. Dive knives are more a hazard in kelp than a help when freediving and the worst place to put a dive knife is on your calf. It’s the most likely place for kelp to get caught and hardest place to reach if you need it. Tape over adjustable fin footstraps, your feet have probably stopped growing anyway. Check that your fins are clear of kelp before kicking for the surface on every dive and look up before hitting the surface. If you are going to surface into kelp lead with your hands to push it out of the way. Keep extraneous items such as stringers and ab gauges off your weightbelt. And of course know where your weightbelt buckle quick release is at all times.”

Some divers and officials say it may be time for the state to require “diver ed” when issuing abalone licenses. They

note that mandatory gun safety education has been successful in reducing hunting fatalities. Others are pushing for the right to carry small pony bottles of compressed air, just for emergencies,

when free diving.

Scuba diving should be relaxing, not a stressful activity. Respect the ocean, and if you think the conditions or locations are unsafe, don’t dive... “Live to Dive another Day”.

Ab Divers: Don't forget to mail in your abalone report card; before year-end!



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Ocean Film Festival Feb. 19-22

The San Francisco Ocean Film Festival (SFOFF) celebrates the sea with inspirational films that reveal the beauty and mysteries of the ocean, experience the thrill of saltwater sports, explore coastal cultures, and pause to reflect on the importance of this vital ecosystem. The Festival is held at the Cowell Theater at Fort Mason Center. Website: www.oceanfilmfest.org

MPA Update

Special thanks to Christopher Chin, Executive Director of the Center for Oceanic Awareness, Research and Education, who filled a last-minute speaker cancellation in October with an informative update on the new Marine Protected Areas in Central and Northern California. Learn more about COARE’s conservation programs at www.coare.org.

BOTTOM TIMES

Nov. 13-16 (Thurs.-Sun.): *American Cetacean Soc. Conference*, Monterey. Info at www.acsonline.org.

Nov. 19 (Wed.): Board Meeting, 6:00, *Club Meeting*, 7:30. Santa Cruz artist Bryant Austin's life size whale images. Call Elliott (415-461-6644).

Dec. 13 (Sat.): *Holiday Party* at Mike and Sharon Royce's home. See enclosed flyer.

Dec. 13 (Sat.): *Cypress Sea boat dive* (3 Dives), Monterey. Call Pierre at SF Reef Divers (415-285-6293).

Jan. 7 (Wed.): *Newsletter deadline*. See below.

Jan. 10 (Sat.): *Cypress Sea boat dive* (3 Dives), Monterey. Call Pierre at SF Reef Divers (415-285-6293).

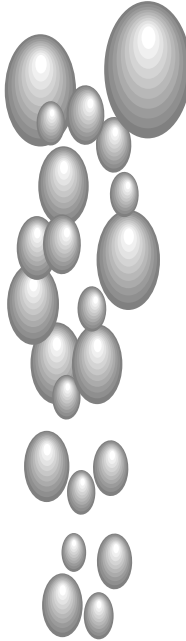
Jan. 21 (Wed.): Board Meeting, 6:00, *Club Meeting*, 7:30. Peter Joseph: Sulawesi Images and Climate Crisis in the Marine World. Call Jeffrey (415- 898-7752).

Feb. 14 (Sat.): *Cypress Sea Valentine's Day dive* (3 Dives), Monterey. Call Pierre at SF Reef Divers (415-285-6293).

Feb. 18 (Wed.): Board Meeting, 6:00, *Club Meeting*, 7:30. Brian Huse, Executive Director of CORAL: State of the Worlds Coral Reefs. Call Jeffrey (415- 898-7752).

Feb. 19-22 (Thurs.-Sun.): *San Francisco Ocean Film Festival*, Cowell Theater, Fort Mason Center. Website: www.oceanfilmfest.org.

Mar. 14 (Sat.): *Cypress Sea boat dive* (3 Dives), Monterey. Call Pierre at SF Reef Divers (415-285-6293).



Everyone a Winner at Halloween

It was a dark and starry night in the hills of San Anselmo on October 25 when a coven of costumed characters convened at Dave Benoit's home for the Club's annual Monster Mash. The party committee (Nathan Cobert, Ross Nadeau, Dyane Mohr, Kat Tyson and Dave) put together some great decorations, fabulous food, and fun and games, including prizes for various categories of costumes. Best overall award went to Ross, who came in the timely guise of Joe Sixpack. Even those of us who didn't win a prize got a complimentary etching from Dave, and had a frightfully good time.

No Abs? No Problem

A small but determined group braved the elements to enjoy Mendocino's Van Damme State Park the first weekend in October. Perhaps not coincidentally, all but John Stein and his kids, Luke and Maddy, slept in motels or in their vehicles. John reports that his tent held up fine in the Friday night rains, and everyone stayed dry.

The weather cleared over the next two days, but the ocean was too rough for ab diving. Ever-ready Alison Fleck brought up a crock pot and cooked chili for the Saturday night potluck.

**Marin Scuba Club
PO Box 3408
San Rafael, CA 94912**



Next Meeting

Wed., Nov. 19

Program:

**Peter Joseph: Sulawesi Images
and
Climate Crisis in the Marine World**

**Happy Hour 6:00-7:00
Socializing: 7:00
Meeting: 7:30-9:15**

**Seafood Peddler,
100 Yacht Club Dr.
San Rafael
(Look for tall boat sign
off East Francisco)**

**MARIN SCUBA
CLUB
NEWSLETTER**

The Club meets the
3rd Wednesday of each month
(**except December**)

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