

AQUANEWS

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A Better Way to Find Lost Divers Mike Ball's invention: special buoys and "dummy divers"

Like many Great Barrier Reef-based dive operations, Mike Ball Dive Expeditions has not been immune from the past few years' incidents of paying customers getting lost on dives and spending hours at sea before getting rescued. In our March issue, we reported on the two American divers who got separated from Mike Ball's Spoilsport and treaded water for seven hours. To prevent repeats of that incident, Mike Ball Expeditions has been testing a new method for locating missing divers at sea. Trevor Jackson, the Spoilsport captain who led the tests, sent us this report.

Imagine being lost from your dive boat. You can see it in the distance searching, moving from side to side on the horizon. But it's so far away, the effort to get to it is fruitless. Your hopes sink with the sun and pretty soon it's dark. With no chance of being spotted for another 12 hours, your thoughts turn to survival, keeping warm, staying together, and conserving energy. Not a situation anyone would want to find himself in.

Recent infamous events here in Queensland, where two divers spent the night drifting around the Reef in the dark last year [Editors: see our report on that in the July 2008 issue of Undercurrent], prompted me to review what we aboard Spoilsport would do if we were faced with every dive boat's nightmare - - divers who don't return. So I decided on a practical experiment.

Early one morning, I made a fake human, dressed it in dive gear and threw it in the water before any crew had come on deck. I told the lookout on duty later to ignore the "diver," and to give the crew no assistance

later on when we went to find it. I let two and a half hours go by. We completed the early dive, and then I alerted the crew that we had a "lost diver," who was last seen entering the water a few hours ago. An initial concentrated search of the horizon produced nothing. The diver was gone from sight.

We then tied a weight belt to a life jacket and threw it in. There was a fair bit of wind and tide about, so the jacket would give us an indication of where to start looking. Surprisingly, the jacket took off in a direction contrary to where we believed the diver might be. Five minutes later we threw another weighted jacket in, followed by another a bit later. Pretty soon, the three jackets were forming a line leading toward the horizon. I instructed the helmsmen of both our dinghies to drive parallel to that line and head out for about a mile. Our fake diver was found, 27 minutes after the drill started and a mile from the boat; completely invisible to the eye and at 90 degrees to where we had initially expected him to be.

The experiment was both pleasing and sobering. The striking thing was that, despite what the conditions seemed to indicate, the diver wasn't going in the direction we had assumed. We decided to build permanent markers to help locate drifting divers and store them on board Spoilsport for such an event. The result was the specially configured floats which you see in the photo on page 12. They include a strobe, built-in radar reflector and a flag, for use both day and night in any conditions.

(Continued on page 2)

AQUANEWS

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We ran regular drills with the buoys to see how well and how consistently they worked. The more we practiced, the more convinced we were that the buoys were going to be a real revelation. The buoys were not only giving us direction but the rate of drift as well. If we knew approximately when the divers went missing, we could apply a little rudimentary math and figure out how far out they were also.

After starting a drill one day, I grabbed one of the crew and said ‘Come on, let’s try something new.’ The dummy diver had been lost for an hour, and we had launched the two buoys 10 minutes apart. Because they were drifting now at the same speed as the diver, we could use the gap between them to get a reasonable idea of how far out we would need to go to find our dummy. Lining up the two buoys in the dinghy, we drove at top speed between the two and timed the ride - - it took 40 seconds to meet our diver. Because the buoys drift at the same rate as a diver, it was then simply a matter of dividing the time the divers were lost by the time interval between when the two buoys were launched. In other words, 60 minutes divided by 10 minutes, equaling six. We then multiplied the time it took for

us to speed between the buoys, 40 seconds by 6, or 240 seconds. All we had to do then was keep the buoys in line and speed out in the right direction for 240 seconds, and our divers should be there, or at least pretty close by.

Despite what the conditions seemed to indicate, the diver wasn’t going in the direction we had assumed.

Over a year has passed since those drills. In dozens of tests, the buoys have given us the direction and distance of our lost diver dummies with stunning accuracy. There are certain conditions in which the buoys don’t work as efficiently but with constant practice and a good measure of common sense, we’ve trained all our crew to use the buoys to regularly locate dummies missing for up to two hours and at ranges up to three miles.

The safety of our guests and crew is of paramount importance here at Mike Ball, as it is for any professional liveaboard on the water. Based on those dummy trials, I know that in the event of an emergency requiring us to locate a diver missing on the surface, we are now one step ahead of the game.



Rockland Aquanauts Organization Inc.
Mission Statement:

To provide, promote, and advance environmental protection, care, and voluntary clean-up of waterways by any and all lawful means; to promote the importance and care in every manner possible by environmental awareness and otherwise; to purchase, print, publish, and circulate literature to promote the importance and care of the waterways and the work of the Corporation. To perform all acts the Corporation may deem appropriate or advisable in such operation; to establish, provide, and voluntary clean-up waterways, to encourage, support and subsidize the cleaning and protection from pollution.

"Alien" Jellyfish Found in Arctic Deep" National Geographic *Month Three*

For 2010 we've decided to add a new series of mini articles that have been featured in National Geographic. Every month, another part of the article "Alien" Jellyfish Found in Arctic Deep" will be posted here.

New Narcomedusa Jellyfish

A new genus and species of narcomedusa--a group of common jellyfish--was discovered from one specimen in 2002 and by the hundreds in 2005 (pictured, an individual spotted in 2005), a scientist said in December 2009.

That scientists could discover a new genus of such a well-known jellyfish group highlights how little we know about the Arctic, Monterey Peninsula College's Raskoff said by email.

Jellies are among the least understood groups of animals on Earth, Raskoff added. "They seem about as alien as animals get."

December 11, 2009December 11, 2009



Photograph by Kevin Raskoff

A COLORFUL NEW CRAB CLAWS ITS WAY TO FAME

A Taiwanese marine biologist said he found this new species of crab on a beach in Pingtung, southern Taiwan. Professor Ho Ping-ho of National Taiwan Ocean University said he found the crab, which resembles a polka-dotted strawberry, while carrying out research on the environmental impact from a shipwreck last year on the region's beaches. A marine biologist says he has discovered a new crab species off the coast of southern Taiwan that looks like a strawberry with small white bumps on its red shell. National Taiwan Ocean University professor Ho Ping-ho says the crab resembles the species living in the areas around Hawaii, Polynesia and Mauritius. But it has a distinctive clam-shaped shell about 1 inch wide, making it distinct. Taiwanese crab specialist, Wang Chia-hsiang confirmed Ho's finding.

The Star-Ledger, Wednesday, January 8, 2010.



Skip the Travel Vest, Just Wear Your BCD

from the January, 2010 issue of Undercurrent

In the last issue, I recommended buying a travel vest to hold your carry-on items and beat airline luggage weight restrictions. Reader Harvey Cohen (Middlefield, NJ) has a cheaper idea: Just put on your BCD over your shirt, wear it onto the plane, then stow it in the overhead bin.

“There’s lots of room in my carry-on bag for dive gear because I wear my Aqualung Pro QD i3 on board. I’ve done this on trips from New York to Nassau, Providenciales and Cairns. I unclip all hardware that’s not an integral part of the BCD, except the weight pockets and my PADI C-card tag. I do sometimes use the two zippered pockets to carry small stuff like snacks or a book. While I’ve never had any comments from airlines or security, I’ve had a couple from passengers. In the boarding line for the flight from Sydney to Cairns, the fellow behind me said, ‘Just can’t wait to start diving, eh?’”

- - Ben Davison

Orchard Beach Clean-up

The few of us that attended the 1st annual dive and beach clean-up had a really great time. Of course the BBQ and clam bake was the best that I ever seen. There was just about every kind of food and drinks that you could ever think of. Everyone chipped in and helped, and any food that was brought was cooked for you by anyone with a grill. All I know is that I can't wait until next year for another chance. Hopefully the weather Gods will shine upon us again as it did this day.





Proposed Hessian Lake Dives 2010



Saturday June 19th @ 9am

Saturday August 14th @ 9am

Sunday September 5th @ 10am

Saturday September 25th @ 10am

Sunday October 10th @ 10am

Saturday October 23rd @ 10am

As soon as we get the official list we will send out a separate flyer

ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP FEES

Rockland Aquanauts Organization
2009 & 2010 Dues

Many of our members have not paid their 2009 dues. It would be appreciated if you could pay them as soon as possible so that I can close out the books for 2009.

Also anyone that wants to pay their 2010 dues can do so. You can then take your tax deduction in 2009.

So please send in your \$42 dues early to;

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April 2010

Better Way to Find Divers, Colorful Crab, Alien Jellyfish, Proposed Hessian Lake, 2010 Dues

**We are currently looking for a place to have our 2010
Annual Dinner...**

Any suggestions?
