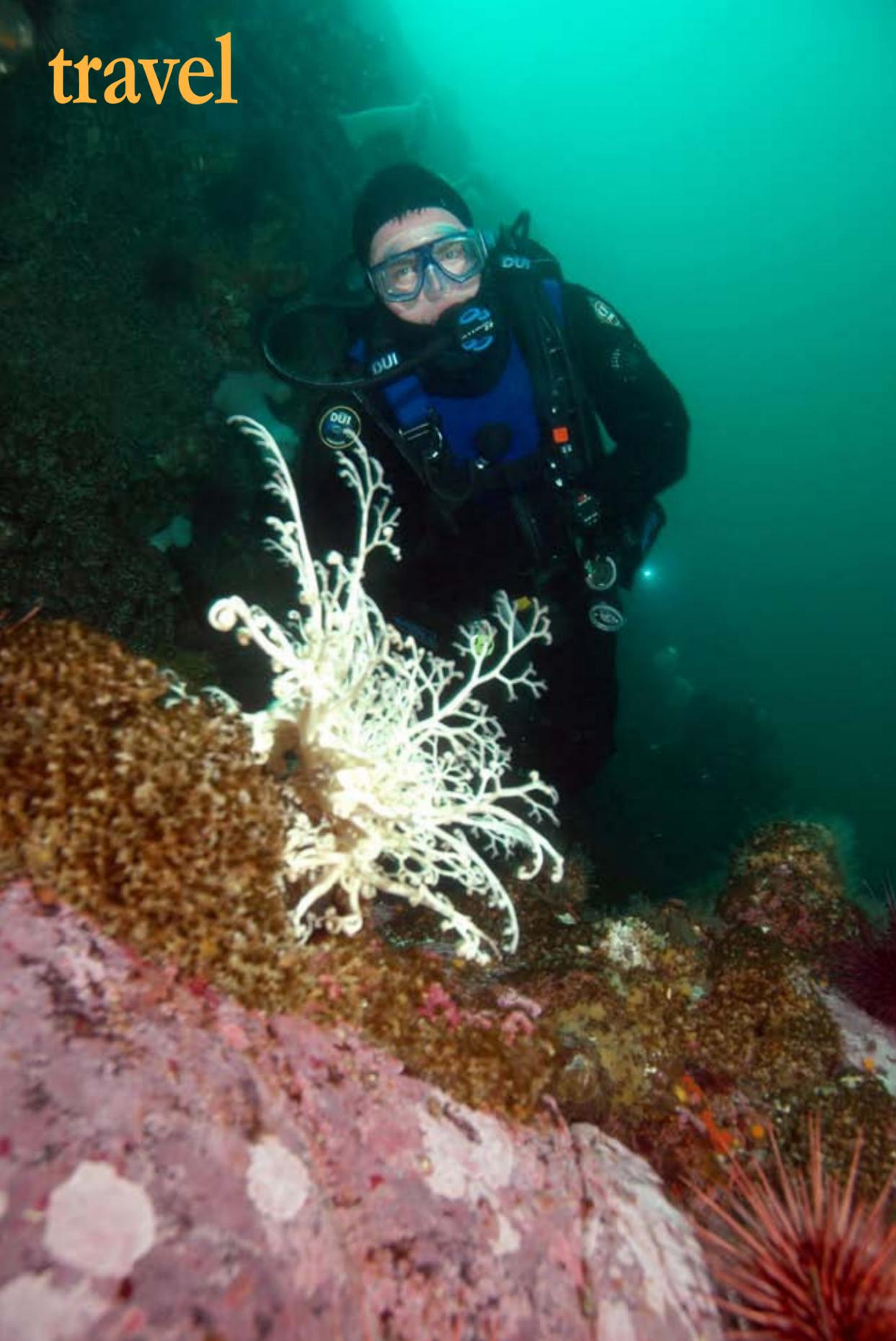




British Columbia's
Port Hardy
aboard the Nautilus Swell

Text by Barb Roy & Wayne Grant
Photos by Barb Roy



It wasn't until Wayne and I were actually leaving Port Hardy aboard the new liveaboard dive boat, the *Nautilus Swell*, that I realized how much I missed this area of British Columbia. The beauty of a calm ocean at sunset with fresh air all around and the tranquility of stillness allowed the hustle and bustle of city life to simply melt away. Only the sounds from squawking seagulls taking flight and the chattering of bald eagles could be heard.

With the smell of dinner baking in the oven and a warm hot coco in hand, we rested against the boat's wooden rail enjoying the scenery. I was smiling because I could hear no ringing cell phones, no emergency vehicle sirens racing by and no worries to clog my brain with irrelevant particulars. A full week of escape from work is what Wayne looked forward to—especially the eating, sleeping and diving parts liveaboards seem to specialize in!

Al Spilde, a seasoned mariner for over 25 years and very familiar with this region, was our captain for the journey and predicted fair weather and good underwater visibility ahead. The rest of the crew included Chris and Belinda Miller, also longtime BC divers who have worked in

the liveaboard industry for years. And our hostess, Claire Brosser, was determined to make everyone's adventure a memorable one.

Hussar Point. Of the three dives listed for the day, our first was a checkout dive at Hussar Point, just around the corner from the world-famous Browning Wall. Now most of you might think a checkout dive would be barren and sandy, hosting little to no life with plenty of room to once again become familiar with buoyancy skills. In Port Hardy, this is not the case. Here, every site is an awesome dive, chocked full of reefs, beautiful walls and something to see at each site.

From the 38-foot aluminum dive skiff, *Inde*, we all peered down into the water

Diver and basket star at Port Hardy (above); The crew of the *Nautilus Swell* in Port Hardy (top right). PREVIOUS PAGE: Diver explores Browning Wall



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: *Inde* dive skiff at Port Hardy; Quillback rockfish at Lucan Chute; Diver shakes hands with an octopus at Browning Wall; Happy divers on the *Inde* get ready to dive

in anticipation, as Al moved closer to the wall. White and orange anemones clung to the rocks just below the surface and the schooling rockfish seemed to be in the hundreds, as they gathered in the

boat's shadow.

Although the *Swell* will accommodate 12 divers comfortably, our group had nine, but only eight were diving. Needless to say, we divided up the 12 dive stations

on *Inde* and had plenty of room for pony bottles, camera gear, video systems and so much more!

Diving

Everyone entered the water and descended into a lush forest of kelp. It was easy to follow the fronds down to the main part of the reef where everyone went in different directions. Wayne and I swam along a wall at 60 feet, admiring the colourful anemones, small darting gobies (fish) and beautiful brightly colored orange-peel nudibranchs. Wayne thought the large white basket stars were exceptionally cool to watch, as they slowly unraveled their branch-like arms in

the mild current to feed.

Continuing on, we came across a tiny juvenile Puget Sound king crab sitting on a piece of kelp which was gently flowing in the current. The little crab, about the size of a person's hand, was a photographer's delight, boasting colours of red, yellow and splashes of radiant purple.

I have always found that it is captivating experiences like this—watching basket stars open up or a tiny crab surfing the current that makes dives like this so rewarding.

Other divers in the group enjoyed grunt sculpins, red Irish Lords and crimson anemones with candy-striped shrimp using the base of the anemones for



Swell

Rockfish school (far left) at Browning Wall; Belinda (left) of *Nautilus Swell* with platefuls of yummy seafood for dinner



visit the realm of deeper dwelling residents.

The wall is located on Nigei Island in Browning Pass, north of Port Hardy. The island itself is covered by a dense forest of hearty coastal trees, which seem to almost touch the water's edge. Other parts of the wall however are solid rock, revealing a sculpted topside terrain tinted with nature's gold and brown colours.

Within ten minutes after descending, Wayne and I came across our first octopus. It wasn't very big but moved contently around and over the wall's crowded collage of life. For a while, I thought Wayne and the



Location of Port Hardy on global map (above); The *Nautilus Swell* is a 90-foot classic tug boat (left and right)



shelter. Probably the most treasured critter sighting, however, was a medium sized giant Pacific octopus out in the open. We were told it played with the divers for many minutes before moving on to other things of interest.

Back on the boat everyone shared their experiences, viewed one another's images and watched videos. After a scrumptious breakfast the next dive was Browning Wall, a dive site we were all excited about.

Wayne laughed at me when he saw my camera was in its housing and ready to go on the boat at least an hour before the dive! What can I say?

Browning Wall. As with the previous dive we saw hundreds of small rockfish next to the wall near the surface. Lengthwise, the site stretched horizontally a couple hundred feet and down to over 200 vertical feet. Unfortunately, we left the technical gear behind—although Trimix would have been wonderful on this dive, allowing us to





THIS PAGE: Picturesque Port Hardy sports some the most awesome sunsets and rainbows



octopus were playing hide and seek because he would move behind a cluster of finger sponge and the octopus seemed to sit up and look for him, then it would do the same behind pink soft corals with Wayne trying to find it.

After about 15 minutes of photographing their play, we continued along the wall, staying in the 40-70 foot range. Visibility was always around 70 feet with my computer informing me the water temperature was 47 degrees Fahrenheit.

Every day in this small slice of Canada's paradise was gratifying, yielding octopuses or wolf eels on almost every dive and plenty of whales, dolphins, sea lions and otters to see and photograph. We had the

option of doing at least three dives per day, every day and the occasional night dive.

Claire always had hot chocolate and freshly baked cookies still warm from the oven waiting for us after each dive. I can't say enough about how good the food was, which I believe is a big part of a liveaboard experience. The meals were always just prepared and varied to provide a tasty selection to meet anyone's palate.

Alex Rock. One of my favorite dives was at a remote site called Alex Rock. I would have to say the word "wow" doesn't do it justice for a description. Two playful sea lions greeted us with their large puppy-

dog faces, performing before us a dance of speed and nimble grace.

Moving down the reef's sloping side, we came across hundreds of large black rockfish intermingled with equally large yellowtails hovering in midwinter. They seemed to peer at us with their inquisitive eyes, as if we were their afternoon diversion. Perched on various rocks and outcroppings, male and female kelp greenlings and quillback rockfish watched us as well.

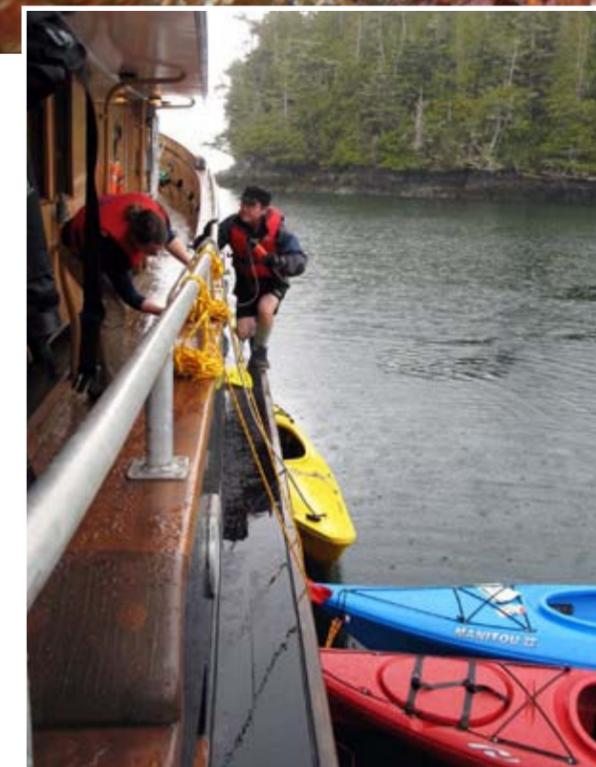
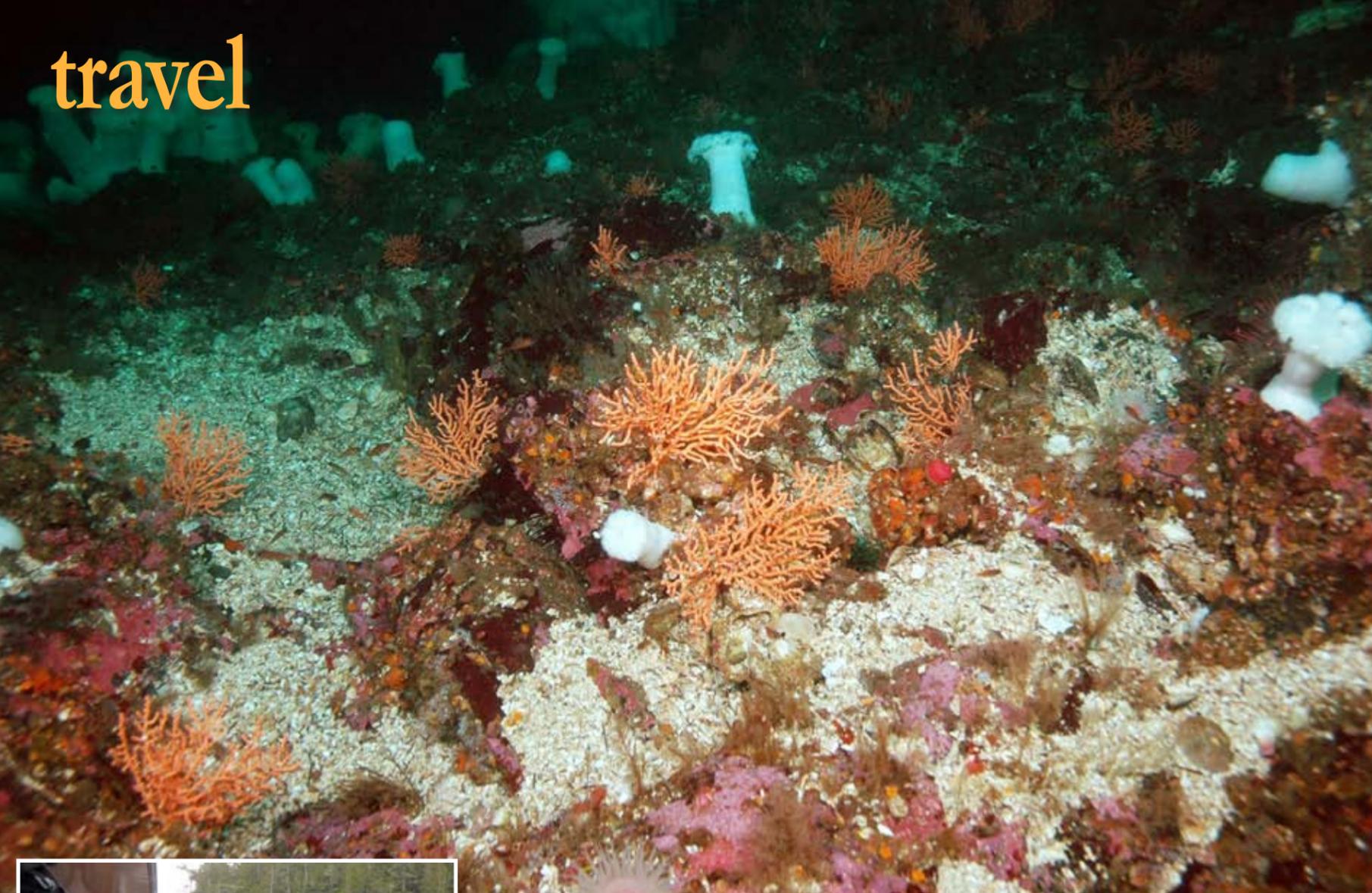
The photographers in our group with close-up lenses were happy to find pink and red soft corals, orange tunicates, large acorn barnacles, delicate hydroids and assorted shades of sea stars. Throngs of pink, white and red crimson anemones

gave the reef splashes of color. Around the lower sections of kelp stalks, smaller brooding anemones could be found, many hosting tiny clone polyps.

The highlight of the dive for Wayne and I was coming across several small pink gorgonian sea fans in 70 feet of water. A few feet deeper we found a whole field of them! We were delighted since this type of gorgonian is usually found at depths of 90 feet or greater.

In an effort to see if they followed the wall down, Wayne dropped over the ledge to deeper water, but didn't see any more. He did however see more basket stars, of all shapes and sizes.

Wayne and I ended up using a patch of kelp for our safety stop. Within it we came upon a thick layer of bull kelp resembling tall flagpoles with wide golden ribbons blowing in the wind (current). Giant kelp intertwined, creating a sheltered canopy for otters floating above and millions of small fish swimming below. I really enjoyed burying myself and camera in the fronds, uncovering one layer after another to see what lay below.



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT INSET: Wayne Grant goes kayaking off the *Swell* in Port Hardy; Gorgonians at Alex Rock; The *Nautilus Swell* cruises Port Hardy; Diver exits the water onto the *Inde*

Strawberry Hill, Fantasy Island. The dives that followed were at places resembling their names like Strawberry Hill (which I was able to name!) and Fantasy Island. The Strawberry Hill site reminded me of outer west coast dives because of the underwater terrain covered in small red anemones. Above the water the huge boulders were bare from winter storms of crashing waves. At Fantasy Wayne played with wolf eels while I photographed a selection of invertebrate life!

Fish Bowl and Snowball. Fish Bowl was another site worth mentioning because in only 20 feet of water the marine life revealed within the bed of kelp at the top of the reef was like discovering a new

world. Wayne later said the site should be renamed to Salad Bowl since the kelp was so varied. The colour I guessed was partly from the fresh early spring growth.

Forming multiple small patches at the top of the reef was an almost iridescence purple and blue branching seaweed which shimmered in the early evening light. Behind it a light pink coralline algae highlighted its effects. When the kelp and algae was moved away we were thrilled to find millions of snails, chitons and limpets! Some of the lined chitons were extraordinary in their designs.

Nudibranchs were also everywhere, some with lacy circular egg casings nearby. Tiny abalone, shrimp and a few sea spiders made their home here as well.

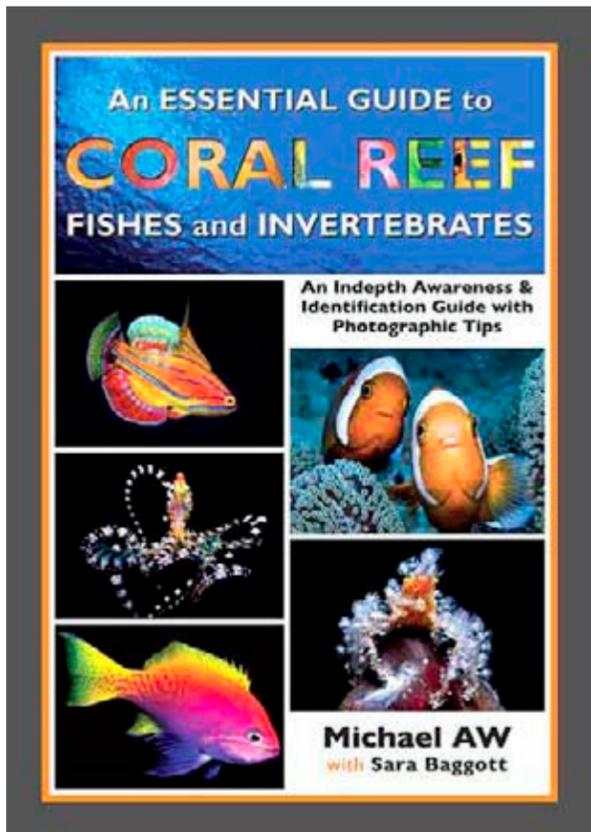
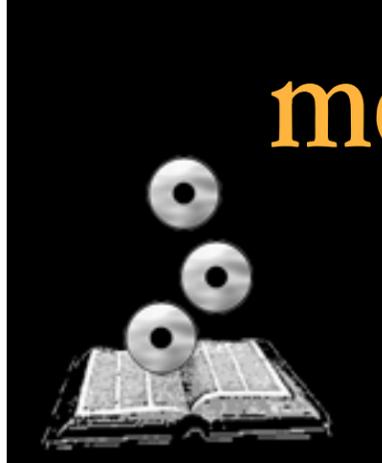
While the other divers explored the depths we decided to remain at the top of the reef because there were plenty of things to see.

Snowball, Lucan Chute & Toy Boy Gap. At Snowball we found millions of small white anemones. Lucan Chute had huge sea lions, large Puget Sound king crabs and many more current-dwelling inhabitants than we could count. Toy Boy Gap was where I found an immense Puget Sound king crab with two small females. The trio was surrounded by yellow sponge, pink soft corals, with a shallow bed of kelp above them.

Tonight was no different than any night

so far, as we patiently waited for dinner while enjoying a glass of chilled red wine or a cold micro brew beer from the boat's selection (additional fee). Some nights 'B' has treated us to fish or chicken, but one night we devoured Prime Rib! Tonight the menu hinted of crisp fish tacos and tender beef enchiladas smothered in cheese. What a treat...

The Nautilus Swell, a refurbished 90-foot tugboat will be operating in the Port Hardy area during the Spring and Fall months, with excursions to Alaska throughout the summer. For more information contact www.nautiluswell.com or call 1-604-657-7614 for reservations. ■



An Essential Guide to Coral Reef Fishes and Invertebrates

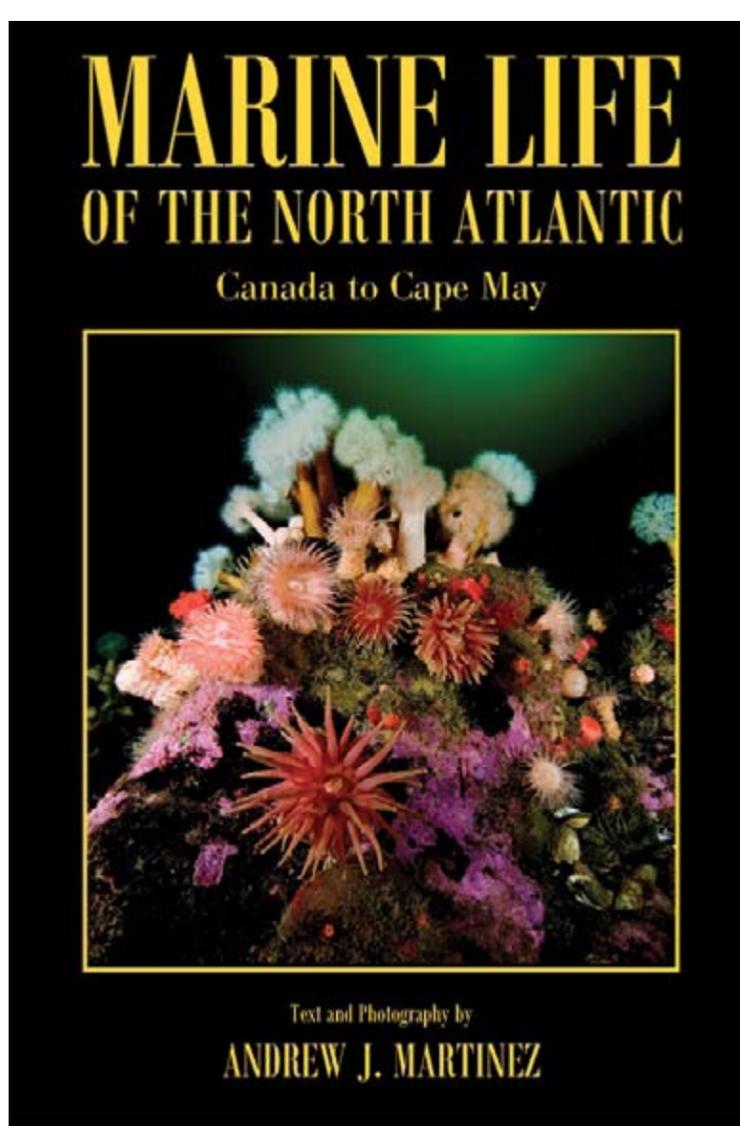
Michael Aw

This jam-packed book does not just cover fish. Invertebrates of all kinds are also given the 'Aw' treatment. From jellyfish to sponges, shrimps to feather stars and many other 'usual suspects' in between. The colour coding on these pages, while grouping types of life forms, is less significant than the fish zones, but it makes for a very colourful rummage if you scan the book at random!

These more static creatures are no less important in the book's contents and are also fully described in their habitats, movements, behaviour and of course, there are tips on how to photograph them successfully.

I was pleased to note both the contents at the front and index section at the back refer to both the latin and English names of the animals. This is not always true of id books and one can spend a long time trying to track down the beast in question, often resorting to flicking optimistically through the pages in the hope of a glimpse. This book is very clearly laid out and indexed.

The photographs to accompany all this fascinating information are typically colourful and vibrant. Michael explains that the pictures are, as they have to be, primarily used to document and identify different species and as such, are not always the most artistic depictions. But, you can't take the photographer out of the author and a lovely short section at the back of the book describes the art form of taking beautiful pictures underwater.



Marine Life of the North Atlantic

Andrew J. Martinez

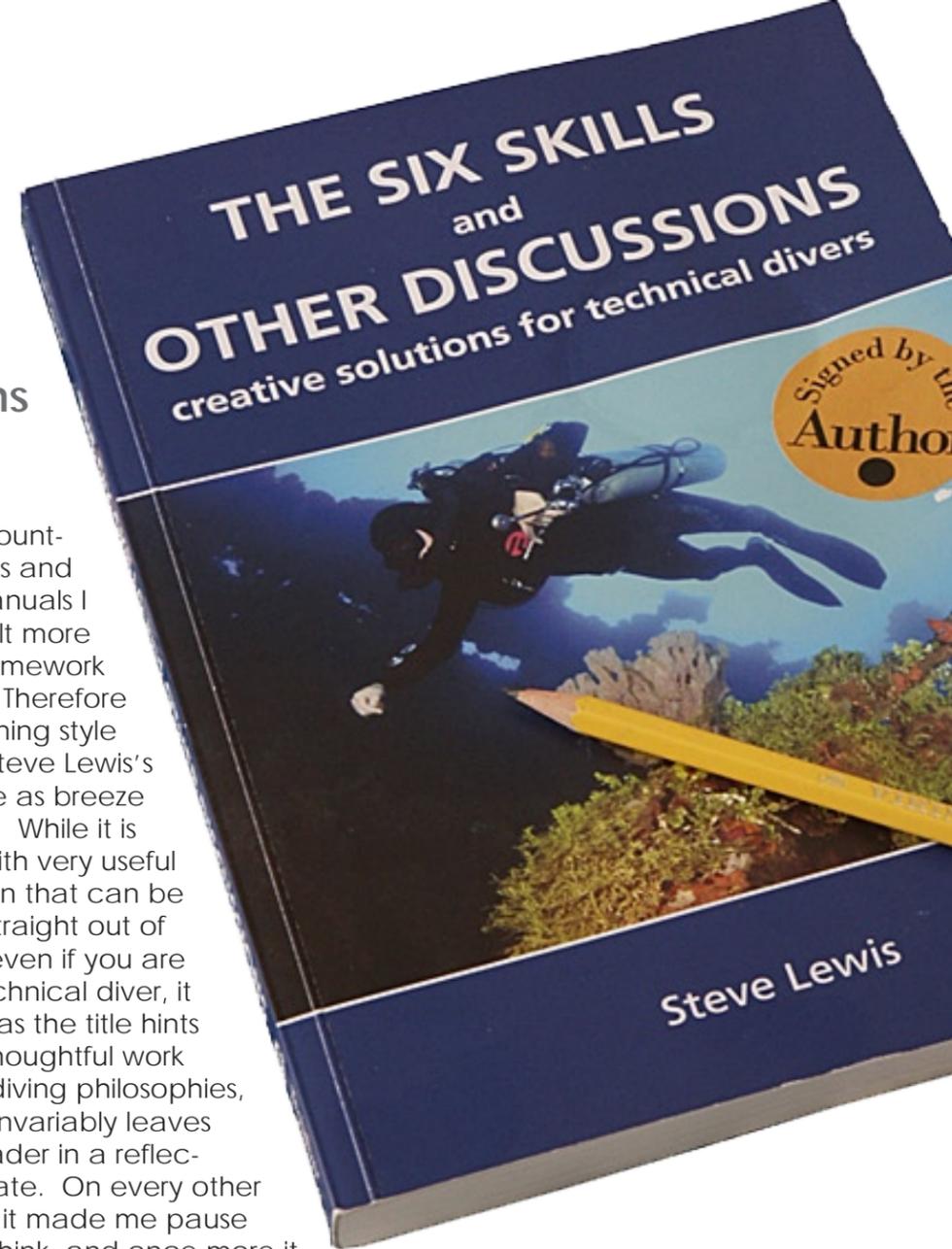
This new and expanded edition of Andrew J. Martinez's classic marine life identification book, *Marine Life of the North Atlantic*, An invaluable reference for scuba divers, naturalists and aquarium enthusiasts.

This comprehensive, yet easy-to-follow guide, covers 278 species of fishes, invertebrates and marine plants. Over 390 color photographs, along with comments on the animals' identification, habitat, range and natural history, makes the *Marine Life of the North Atlantic, Canada to Cape May* an invaluable reference for scuba divers, naturalists and aquarium enthusiasts. Over 200 of the photographs are new to this edition. The author, Andrew J. Martinez, has been photographing marine life for over 40 years. His adventures have taken him from the frigid Canadian waters to the tropical wonders of Indonesia

The Six Skills and Other Discussions

Steve Lewis

Many of the countless dive books and mostly dry manuals I have read felt more like doing homework or studying. Therefore the entertaining style and wit in Steve Lewis's book came as breeze of fresh air. While it is packed with very useful information that can be applied straight out of the box even if you are not a technical diver, it is also – as the title hints at – a thoughtful work about diving philosophies, which invariably leaves the reader in a reflective state. On every other page it made me pause and think, and once more it wetted my appetite for bettering my skills. No mean feat considering I have been diving for quarter of a century and hold multiple instructor certifications. Therein lies the greatest achievement in this book. Like few... no... like no other book in the field it manages to go about the subject matter in a skilful and still serious, yet light-hearted and humorous way. Yes, we do need to take these skills and techniques very seriously if we want to venture into the realm of technical diving but as Steve Lewis so brilliantly reminds us, we must never forget that we also do it to live our lives and have fun and adventures. The individual chapters, there are 11 in total, deal with one subject at a time i.e. buoyancy, trim or breathing and can almost be considered individual lectures. I am going to bring this book on my next trip and use it to better my skills. I also consider this book to be an excellent birthday gift or christmas present to any aspiring diver. — Peter Symes





Tarpon and school of Silverside Minnows, East End, Grand Cayman Island. 10mm lens, ISO 50, Twin Sea & Sea YS100 flash, 1/80th second at F8

owners are recommended to purchase an additional external flash unit that actually fires as a 'slave' to the camera's own internal flash by the use of a fibre optic cable, allowing for a greater spread of light to illuminate a larger subject area. White balance settings ultimately always help, but the addition of external flash is better still. As you can see, light and its absorption causes all sorts of problems once it starts to penetrate the underwater realm.

ately, it is the particles in suspension in the water, (which reduces the visibility) which get in the way of a clearly lit photograph. In low visibility, these particles in suspension, be they planktonic debris, bits of rusty particles knocked off an old wreck, small marine critters dislodged by a diver's exhaust air bubbles, the bubbles themselves or sedimentation; any and all of the above will produce an effect called 'backscatter'. This occurs when the burst of light produced by your electronic flash bounces off and reflects back to the camera's lens, before it has reached the subject to be illuminated.

Flash Photography

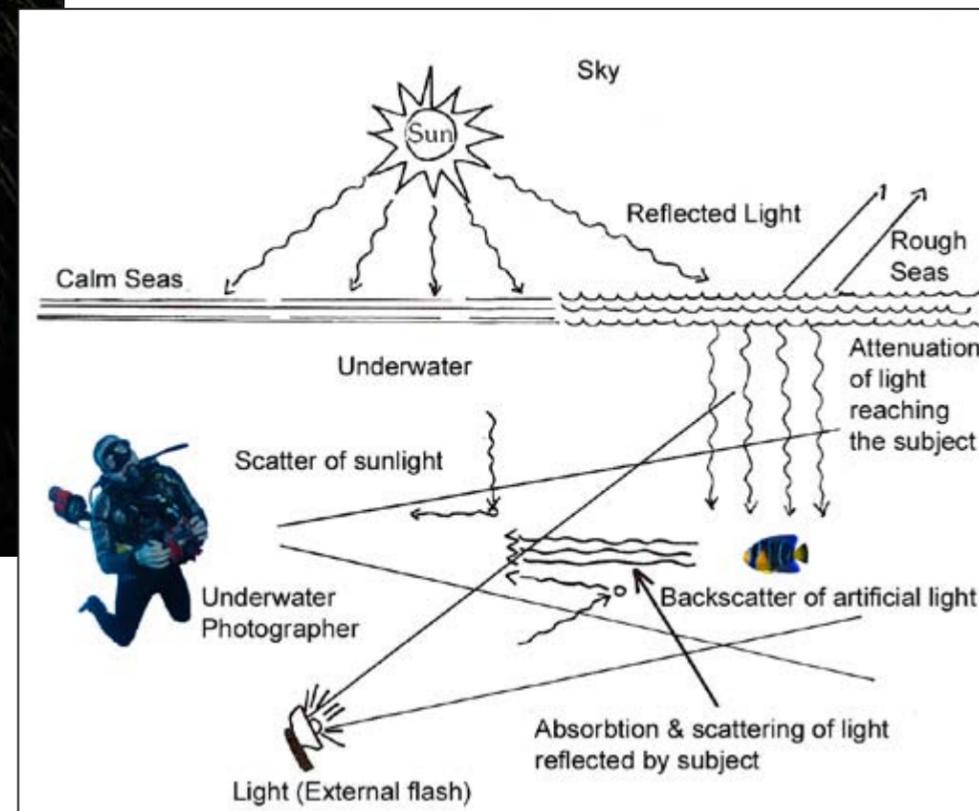
Text & images by Lawson Wood

We already know that as you go underwater, that light refracts and changes colour with the density of the water. You lose the colour red in less than 2 metres (6.5ft) and that colour gradually loses intensity the deeper we go underwater. To compensate for

this loss of light and colour, we either add a flash to illuminate the subject, a filter to alter the colour spectrum being 'seen' by the camera, change the white balance accordingly at the beginning of the dive or by a quick fix on Photoshop. This loss of colour

is the underwater photographer's ultimate challenge, our goal is to bring back as much of the real and natural colour as possible, allowing the viewer to truly appreciate the splendour of our underwater world. By far, the simplest (yet costly)

way forward is to use flash. Most Compact Cameras have fairly adequate internal flash to illuminate close-up subjects, but this small flash is not strong enough to illuminate larger subjects or subjects at a distance of over 1 metre (3.25ft). Those Compact camera



The way light is affected once we go underwater

The principal problem which underwater photographers face is the fact that we are underwater and it is the water that gets in the way of the picture, or more accu-

When using flash to take a photograph of the subject, not only do we have to cope with the attenuation of light reaching the subject, we also have to deal





Clown Anemonefish (Amphiprion ocellatus), Lembeh Straits, Indonesia. 105mm lens, ISO 200, Sea & Sea YS110 flash, 1/125th second at F22

eases the stress on you and the critter) and use the camera's internal zoom lens to get closer once more and allow you to compose the subject

with full illumination, no stress and no shadows.

As you can see, clearly illustrated is the problem with the Canon compact camera's housing creating a shadow when working

in close to the subject, yet it is cured by staying further back and using the zoom instead.

The use of 'fill-in' flash is perhaps the most rewarding as our camera's automatic settings do like to give their sensor's rendition of the colour of the background water, whether it be the green of Scottish waters or the brilliant cobalt blue of the Red Sea; Pacific or Caribbean waters. By using just enough flash to fill in the colours of the subject in the foreground, yet still take the photograph at the same aperture (of the natural light available), we are



Stareye Hermit Crab (Dardanus venosus), Dominica. Canon Powershot S95, ISO 200

with various sea conditions; sunny or cloudy overcast days, highly reflective subjects such as silver-side minnows or even a diver's bald head!

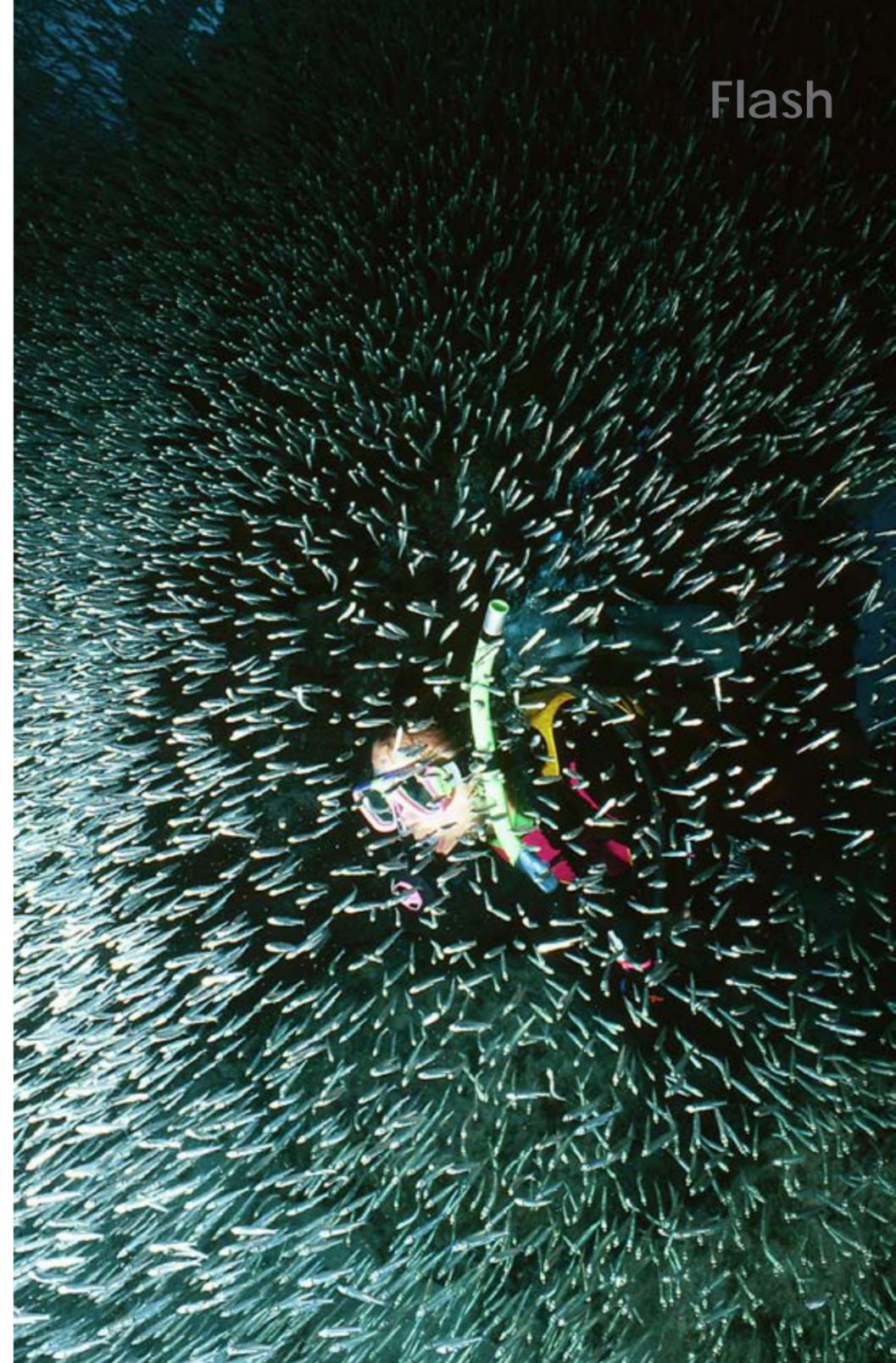
(Assuming that the water is crystal clear) The calmer the water the more light is able to penetrate into the depths and allow for natural light illumination of your subject. This obviously does not happen in poor visibility areas and these dives should almost be treated as potential night dives.

The rougher the water the more a higher percentage of the sun's rays are deflected back up into the atmosphere. Light does filter down from above to the subject, but due to the refractive index of light absorption, you lose the colour red in approximately 2m (6.5ft) of water. There is of course a scattering of light in the water column as well as the subject matter actually absorbing and reflecting light particles as you take the photograph.

By concentrating the flash directly

into the centre of the subject area, (See main image, previous page) I was able to illuminate all of the fish and the extreme wide angle of the lens gave the impression of vignetting with the outside of the frame fading to dark. Undoubtedly flash always enhances a highly colourful subject, but it is also extremely effective in illuminating fairly monochrome subjects such as the silvery fish.

On a compact camera, the use of the camera's internal flash (whilst it is powerful enough to illuminate the subject) it is incorrectly positioned due to the housing's manufacture and this will always create a shadow in the lower right hand side of the photograph, particularly when using the macro setting on the camera. The way to get around this anomaly is to keep the camera setting on macro, with the flash on; move further back and away from the subject (this also



Flash

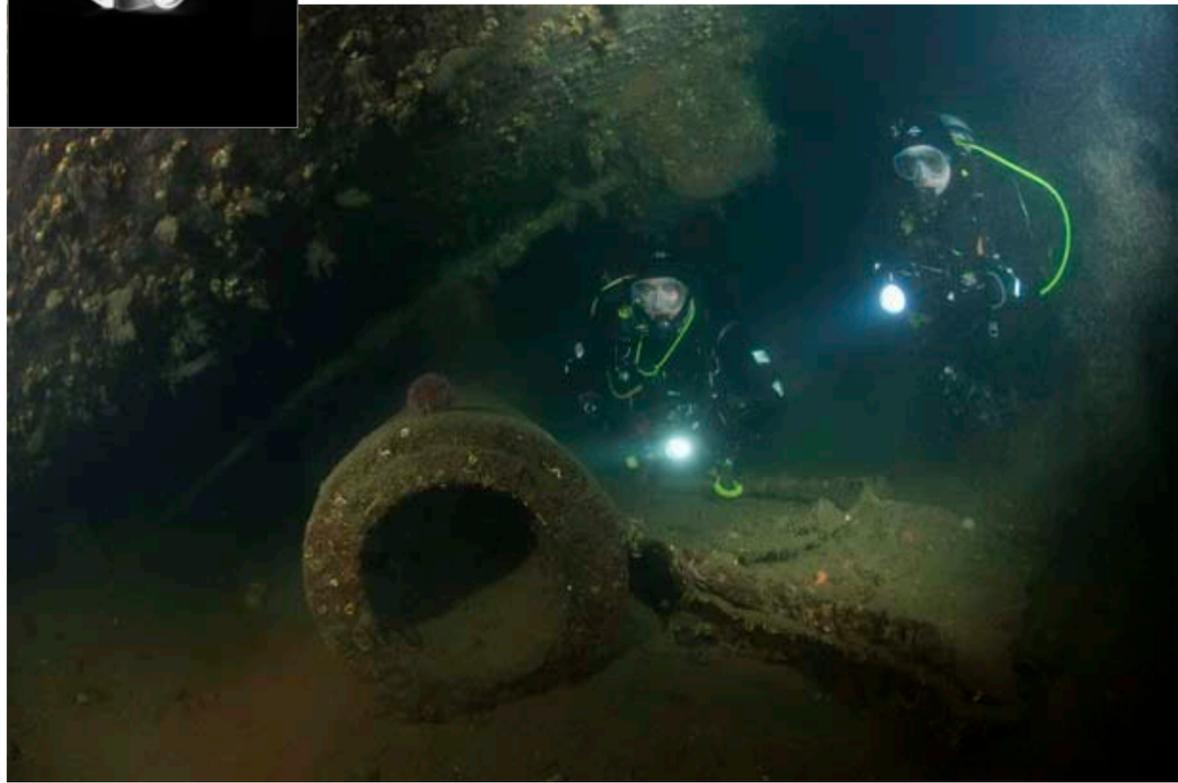
Reflective surfaces such as the sides of these silverside minnows have to be treated with caution, as too much flash will produce flare that will bounce back and overexpose the photograph.

able to give colour and depth to the subject and the scene overall. The use of flash underwater in inevitably challenging. Take for

instance these previous two photographs taken recently at Scapa Flow in the Orkney Islands off the northern shores of Scotland.



Technical Diver Nat from Divetech on Grand Cayman Island. 10mm lens, ISO 100, Twin Sea & Sea YS110 flash, 1/80h second at F:11



Stern gun on the German Battlecruiser Kronprinz Wilhelm, Scapa Flow. 10mm lens, ISO 400, Twin Sea & Sea YS110 flash, 1/80h second at F:5.6

Both are in very similar conditions, but the first photograph on the Kronprinz Wilhelm is taken in 46m (150ft) and we are actually underneath the ship. The muddy seabed is getting stirred up, there is no natural light due to the deep shadow created by the looming shipwreck overhead and I have to completely illuminate all of the subject area. The second photograph on the Karlsruhe is taken in 26m (90ft). The underwater visibility is the same, but there is now enough ambient light to illuminate the subject area, but I still need 'fill-in' flash to highlight the divers and the wreckage of the gun in the foreground. The divers/models are using their dive lights and these also give the impression that it is the divers which are illuminating the gun, and not my camera's flash – perfect as far as I am concerned!

By not taking care in the use of the camera's command dial, I reversed the settings that I was aiming for and subsequently lowered the aperture and increased the speed of the shutter. Sadly my flash did not synchronize to the 1000th of a second shutter speed and failed to fully illuminate the subject. Care must always be taken when adjusting the camera speed and shutter control.



Banded Shrimpgoby (Neoturrus pileata), Red Sea. 60mm lens, ISO 100, Sea & Sea YS180 flash, 1/1000th second at F3.4

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A similar problem, but at the opposite end of the spectrum happens when the camera is set on automatic and trusting that the flash will recharge in time to be able to synchronize with

Green Turtle (Chelonia mydas)
Sipadan Island, Malaysia.
20mm lens, ISO 100, Sea & Sea
(misfired) YS180 flash, 1/8th
second at F3.4

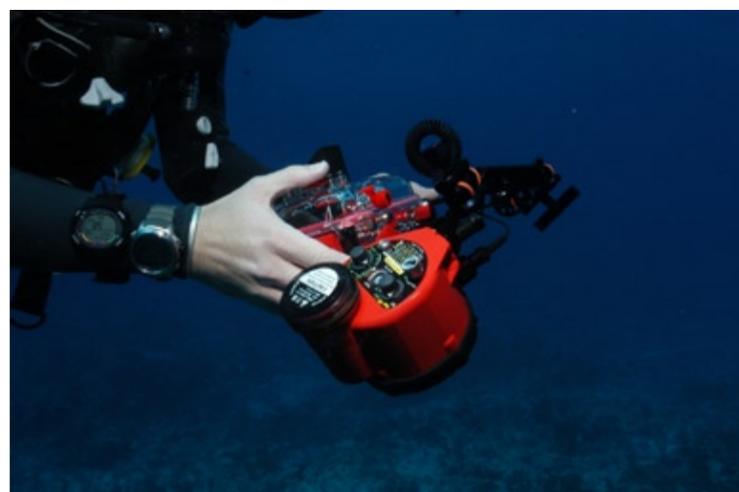


Flash

first, followed instantaneously by the second photograph before the flash had time to recycle and fire again. The subjects are virtually identical, excepting that one can clearly see the effects of using or not using flash underwater to illuminate a subject area. The flash has clearly illuminated the brilliant colours of the soft corals, yet have failed in power to reach my dive partner Reeta in the background, exactly the effect that I was wanting to achieve. By reversing these images in a dissolve style audio-visual presentation you have the effect of a rather drab colourless photograph virtually coming to light before your eyes.



the shutter speed. Sadly the flash has not recharged in time to be able to fire and the automatic setting on the camera has reduced the shutter speed so low that the subject is not only moving, it is out of focus too. (Nevertheless, it is still a pleasing photograph!).



A Compact Camera with attached external flash

The sequence of two photographs that I am using to illustrate this example were actually taken with the flash (full colour) photograph on the right)



Reeta Tunney along a wall of soft corals in the northern Red Sea. 10mm lens, ISO 100, Twin Sea & Sea YS110 flash, 1/125th second at 8.



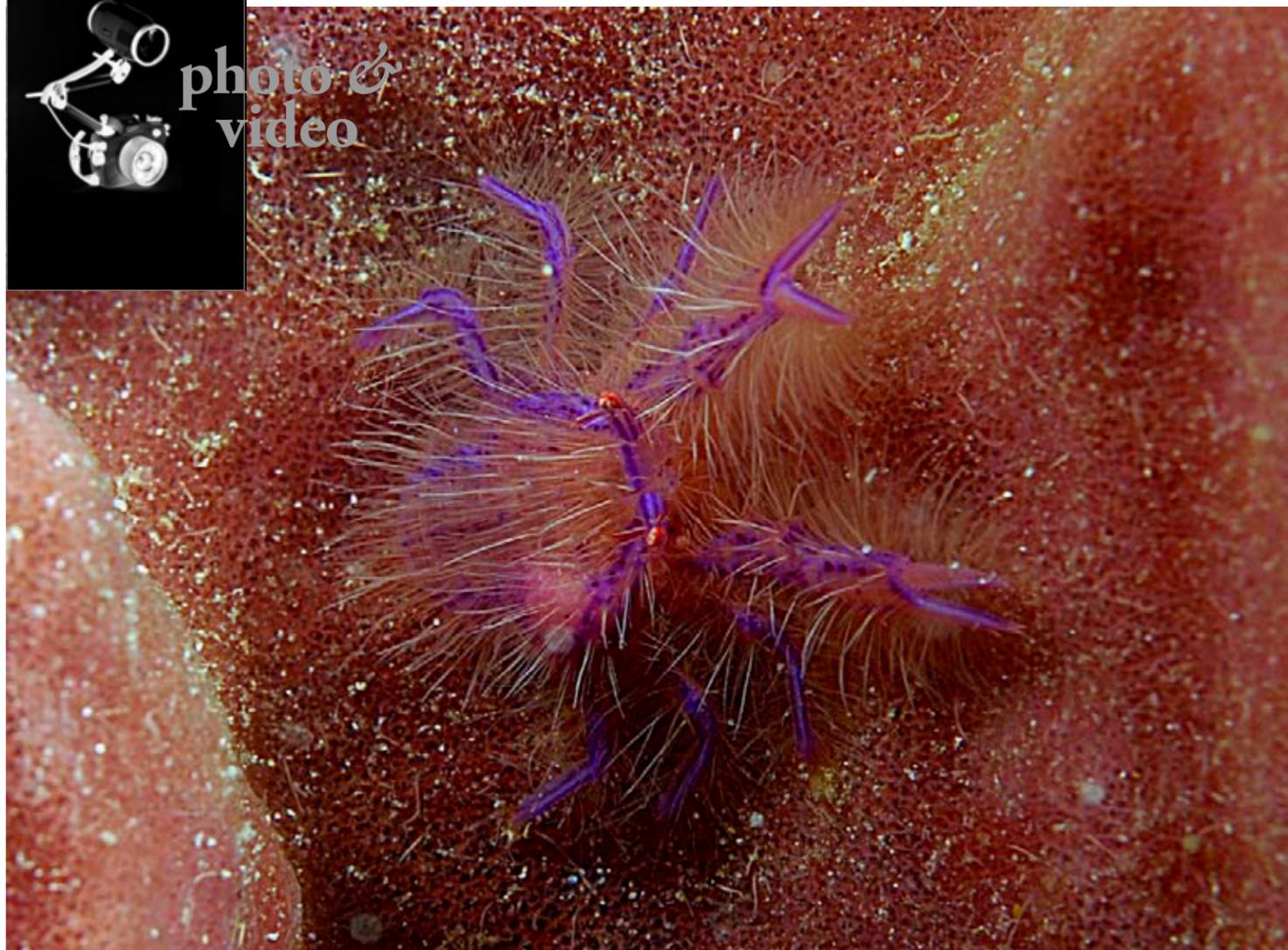
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photo & video



Hairy Squat Lobster Gangga Island, northern Sulawesi, Indonesia) 105mm lens with +2 dioptre, ISO 100, Twin Sea & Sea YS110 flash, 1/80h second at F:8

the brunt of these rules as invariably there will be additional costs levied onto your holiday travel cost.

With this in mind, many divers opt for the simpler (yet still very versatile) Compact Camera as it can be carried in hand luggage and rarely raises an eyebrow as it passes through X-Ray machines. For those of us lumbered with large DSLR's, plus housing; plus perhaps two external flash; extendable arms; batteries; recharging units; numerous lenses; numerous ports for the housing to suit the lenses and inevitably we will also be trying to smuggle on board a laptop computer; external hard drives; memory cards and even DVD's. Can you imagine the apoplexy that the security guards have at airports when they see all that hardware in one case that can hardly be called hand baggage, as it weighs more

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than your hold luggage with all of your diving gear; torch lights; diving computer; clothes and wee home from home snacks to make

Undoubtedly, the use of flash underwater is absolutely essential to bring to light (please excuse the pun) the actual true and brilliant colours which the eye and the camera lens rarely see in all of their glory, except in extremely shallow water. Only with flash, set to the correct colour temperature as that of daylight (approx 6,500K) that you are able to obtain truly stunning colour renditions of a rather drab and usually colourless underwater world. Flash photography, of course, is always used on night dives, as rarely do divers carry sufficient continuous and powerful lights to completely illuminate the seabed to allow your camera to use a natural light setting, even at night. Sorry, but I have actually wit-

nessed this! For the rest of us, the use of a camera and flash either internal or external on a compact camera and external on a housed dslr are dérigueur for all of us underwater photographers.

The use of a spotting light (often located inside the flash) such as some of the Sea & Sea flash; Ikelite and Inon models is an absolute must not only to aid composition, but for also finding immediately which brilliant colours are on display by many of the marine critters which are often only seen out at night. No matter what type of camera you are carrying underwater, buoyancy control has to be second nature in approaching your subject matter.

No matter what type of underwater camera system you opt for, immediately you will note the distinct difference in size. They say size doesn't matter, well apparently it does! With more and more weight restrictions being levied on international airline travelers, the underwater photographer undoubtedly feels

A housed DSLR with attached external flash Subject: Snowy, Jackson Reef, northern Red Sea 10mm lens, ISO 100, twin Sea & Sea YS110 flash, 1/125th second at F8



your overseas dive trip more bearable, just in case you do not like the food!

Who on earth said that this was fun! But, when those little critters start to perform for you, or when that whale-shark just arrives at the same time as you, or when you find your first hairy squat lobster without the use of a dive guide, and you correctly illuminate a golden cup coral on a night dive, then all the effort is worth it.

Sometimes backscatter can be used to your

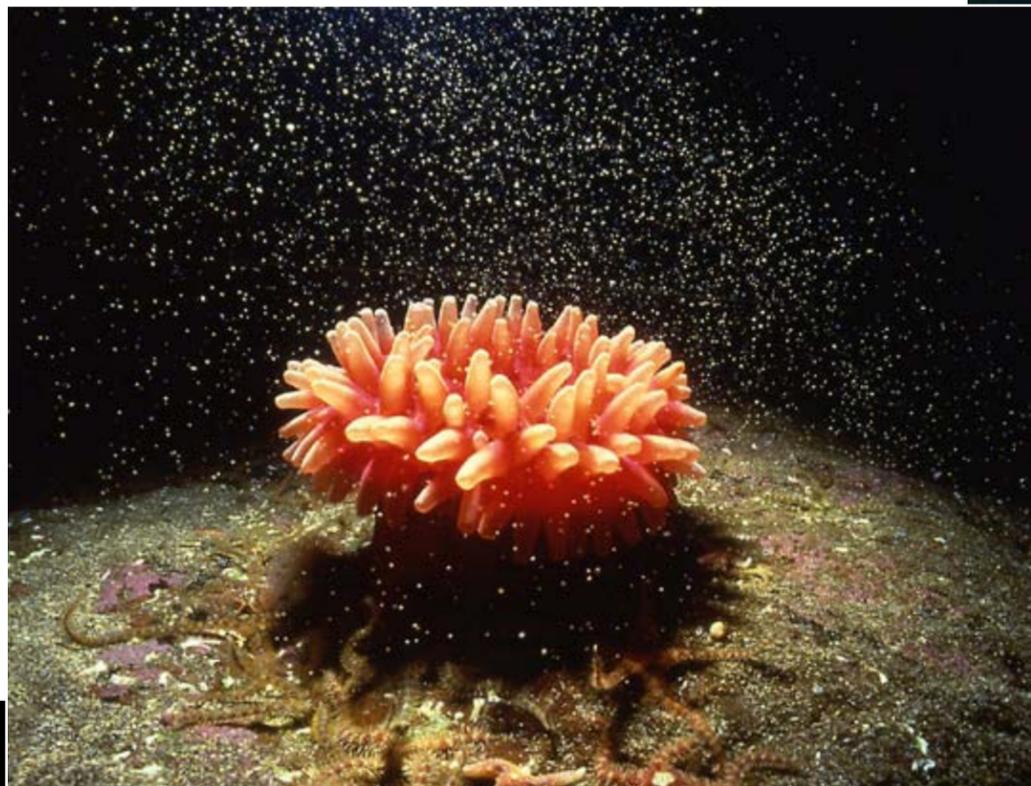




Salmon, Glen Etive Pools, Scottish Highlands
15mm lens, ISO 50, Sea & Sea YS120 flash,
1/125th second at F:11

Flash

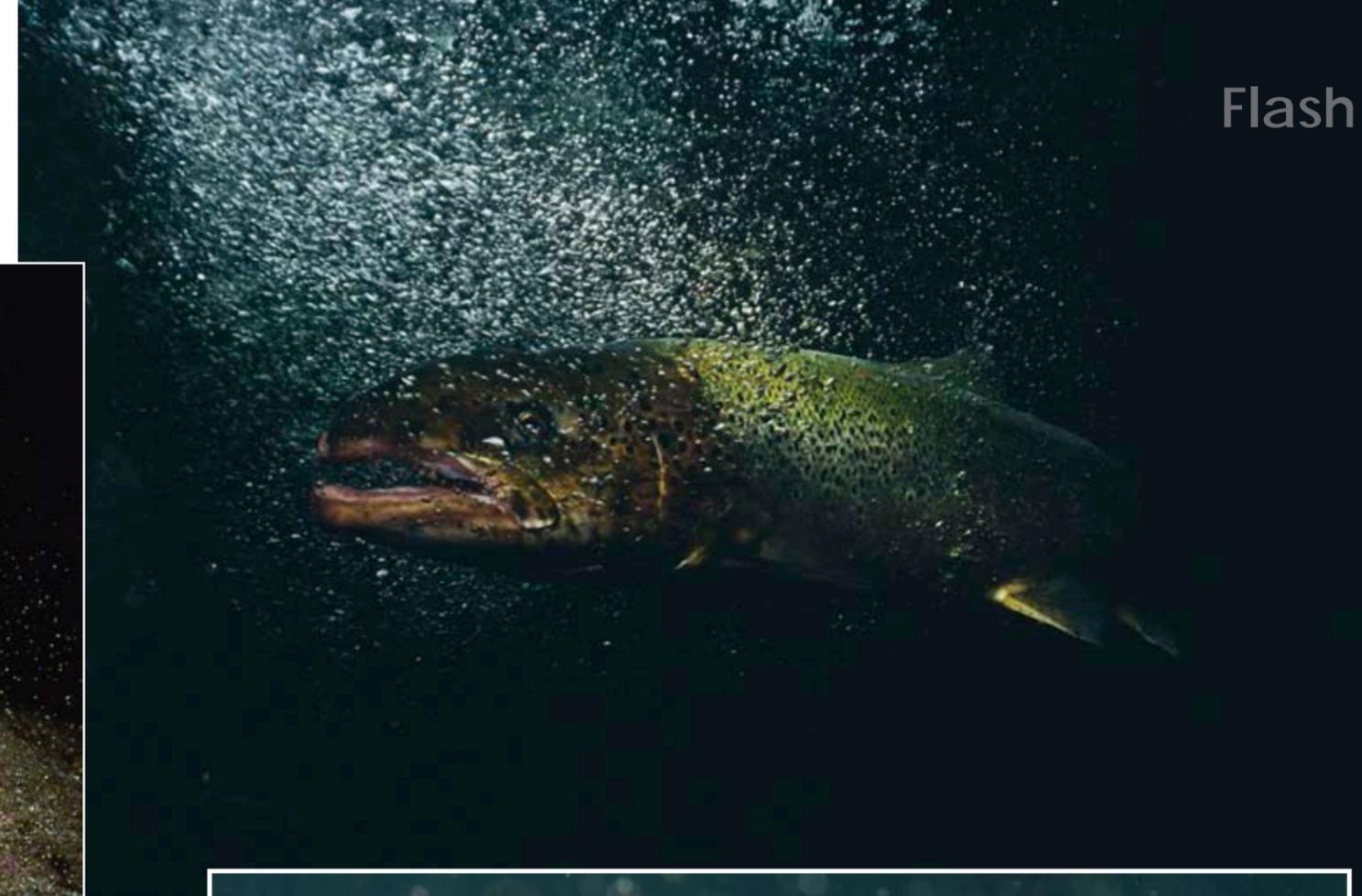
advantage. Undoubtedly these photographs work because of the backscatter. It gives a very real sense of being underwater and highlights the fact that not all of our diving is in crystal clear water in exotic locations. Most of us dive much closer to home and invariably our home waters are generally not as clear as we would like them to be. Here we are faced with lots of highly reflective air bubbles from the underside of a waterfall plunging into a fresh water pool and the



Dahlia Anemone (*Urticina eques*)
St. Abbs, Scotland. 15mm lens, ISO
50, Sea & Sea YS200 flash, 1/60th
second at F16

other is quite simply taken in extremely bad visibility where backscatter is expected, it is accepted and it is then used to create the photograph required.

Sometimes however, no matter how skilful you are in underwater photography and photoshop techniques, some photographs are just not worth rescuing. In this instance not only am I too close to the subjects, the visibility is just too poor; I have got my lighting wrong and generally this should be consigned to the digital bin. ■



Golden Cup Coral (*Tubastrea aurea*), Red Sea. 60mm lens, ISO 100, Sea & Sea YS120 flash, 1/125th second at F:11



Ornate Ghost Pipefish (*Solenostomus paradoxus*) Gangga island, North Sulawesi, Indonesia. 60mm lens, ISO 100, Sea & Sea YS120 flash, 1/125th second at F:11





Easydive Updates Video Housings

The Italian housing manufacturer Easydive has released details of an update to their Atlantis/Zeus housings. The innovative housing is available in three different lengths to accommodate all major camera models on the market—the models are the Zeus, Atlantis Mini and Atlantis. The updated Atlantis series has a new military-style 40 micron black anodized coating and removable front door that, using the threads located on the front flange, allows the use of any Easydive port. This allows the use of Easywide and Easymacro ports, as well as the optical Superwide Pro HD. easydive.eu

Light & Motion Provide Canon G10 Support

Light and Motion has formally announced that it will support the Canon G10 prosumer camcorder with its state-of-the-art Bluefin housing range. The California-based company typically focuses on professional grade camcorders, but the excellent performance possible with the prosumer Canon G10 has made it reconsider its strategy. Light and Motion have stated that "After several test dives it's obvious the G10 produces superior video results we haven't seen in a HD compact video system. The G10 is in a class by itself." uwimaging.com



Nautacam GH2 Housing

Nautacam has announced the release of a new housing for the highly regarded Panasonic GH2 Micro Four-Thirds System camera. The housing—the NA GH2—is constructed from aluminium, rated to 100m and is designed to provide underwater photographers with an option to use the Micro Four-Thirds System, which has won a lot of fans with its compact design and picture quality that rivals DSLRs. The Panasonic GH2 features RAW shooting capability, TTL mode, and 1080i/p at 60fps video and should perform very well underwater. The Nautacam NA2 housing provides access to all the most important controls on the GH2 camera using some innovative technology. nauticamusa.com



Bonica Seashell II Housing

In the fall of 2010, Bonica introduced the Seashell I, an underwater housing suitable for almost any compact camera featuring a pop-out external zoom lens. Hot on its heels, the company has introduced the Seashell II housing for cameras with an internal zoom such as the Sony T. Fitting most compact cameras, the Seashell series are easily adjustable with the provided spacers and shims, with the average user being able to fit a camera anywhere from a few minutes to half an hour. With a depth rating of 130 feet, both housings meet all the requirements for recreational divers. Both the Seashell I and II are available across Canada and the United States for a suggested retail price of US\$169.00. bonicadive.com



Fix Aquavolt 5000

Japanese manufacturer Fisheye has announced the release of the Fix Aquavolt 5000 underwater aiming light. The unit has 12 highly luminance white LEDs, which deliver up to 5,000 lumens of bright light over a beam angle of 120 degrees with a color temperature of 6500-8000K. The corrosion-resistant aluminum alloy body is designed to sustain the pressure of the depth up to the 100 meters. The Aquavolt 5000 has a Li-Ion rechargeable high capacity battery capable of up to 75 minutes of consequent lighting and no discharge.



Ikelite Releases Four New Compact Housings

Ikelite has announced the release of four new housings for compact cameras—the Nikon Coolpix S3100, Sony Cybershot DSC-W530, and the Canon ELPH 300HS and IXUS 220HS. The new housings share many of the same features and are made with Ikelite's standard polycarbonate material, depth rated to 200ft, and will retail for US\$260. In addition, the housings share the ability to include optional add-ons like external filters, release handle trays, TTL exposure capability, and several external accessory lenses. ikelite.com

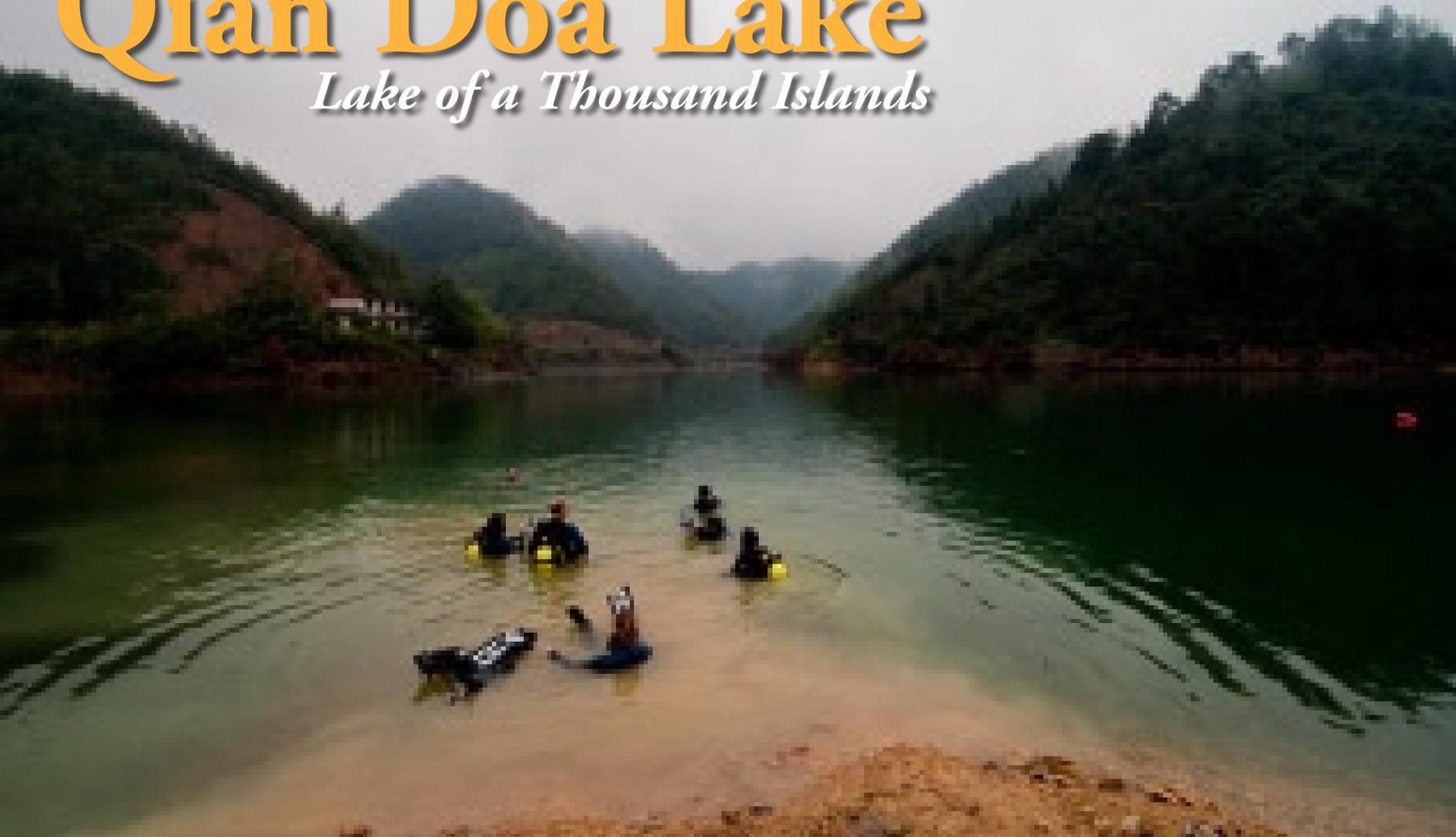


Diving the Lion City

Qian Doa Lake

Lake of a Thousand Islands

Text and topside photos by Don Silcock
Underwater photos courtesy of Big Blue Diving



When I was asked to do an 18-month assignment in China in 2008, I thought the last thing I would need would be my diving and underwater photography equipment—but that was before I stumbled on the local diving community in Shanghai, where I was living.

I was quite surprised to discover that there are actually a few dive shops in Shanghai, but they seem to exist solely to train expats and take them on trips outside of China, as there is literally nowhere to dive around the city or along the nearby coastline because of the scourge of pollution.

Then I heard about Big Blue Diving, run by Leigh Chan, and their trips to Qian Dao Lake some five hours south-west of Shanghai in Zhejiang Province.

Qian Dao Lake was created in

1959 as part of the Xin Anjiang Dam and hydro power project—the lake being the reservoir for the power plant, but displacing some 290,000 people in the process. Many of these people's descendants had lived in the area since the main town, called Lion City was first established about 1,800 years ago. Lion City now lays 30-40m underwater but was found again when the main Chinese TV station, CCTV, located it with sonar as part of a project into lost ancient treasure.

A subsequent survey by professional divers found an intact wall running around the exterior of the city in a circular pattern, inside of which were many traditional Chinese buildings, many dating back to the Ming and Qing dynasties.

Big Blue had some recent photographs on their site from the exploration dives they had conducted, but they warned me that visibility could be pretty bad on the bottom and the lake itself was cold.





all non-diving related gear and head for the dive site.

From the hotel, it was a 20-minute drive to the lakeside area where we were to kit up and, for those of us who were diving on the Lion City, board the “dive boats” to take us out on the lake.

The area we were using to kit up looked like it would eventually be the driveway to a well-heeled local's weekend lakeside retreat. The dive boats were local fishing boats, who are apparently taking advantage of the laws of supply and demand, to charge very high



Undeterred, I signed up for the next trip and arranged to bring all my dry suit diving gear, plus my camera gear, back with me to Shanghai, and one Friday night in September 2008, we were off in the Big Blue bus for a weekend of adventure!

Six at night is not a great time to be trying to get out of Shanghai, and it seemed to take

hours to get onto the new freeway heading south to Hangzhou. We stopped at the last service station before we left the freeway and headed west for Qian Dao, which signalled the change from modern China, with its idiosyncratic versions of western facilities, to the “real China” (read poor, but very interesting).

We did manage a couple of

beers and a snack at the service station though, and then it was back in the bus for another couple of hours until we got to the edge of the Qian Dao National Park and our hotel for the night.

Five hours sleep later, it was up again, and after a quick local breakfast, we were back on the bus making our way to catch the ferry that would take us across

the lake and to the town nearest to the site of the submerged Lion City.

The ferry journey was quite memorable because the lake with its 1,078 large islands and couple of thousand smaller ones is really very scenic. From the ferry, we got to our one-star hotel (the best in town—seriously!) and checked in, so we could dump



City boarded the dive boats and chugged out to the dive site, guided by Leigh Chan of Big Blue Diving and his GPS. It was very peaceful out on the lake, almost serene in a sense, because apart from a large ship about a kilometer away, we were the only people out there.

When we arrived at the dive location, we were given a good briefing by Leigh and warned that the visibility may be quite bad, then it was into the water and, after a quick OK all round, we started our descent.

rates to use them because there is simply no alternative.

The rest of the weekend's participants were using the trip to Qian Dao lake to complete certification dives and exercises from the shore area.

Those of us who were diving the Lion

At ten meters, I could tell that this was going to be quite an interesting dive, as it was going dark rapidly. At about 20m, I was no longer able to see my gauges, and shortly after



my descent halted, I landed in what felt like deep and very soft silt.

At that point in time, I have to say that I was a little concerned—I appeared to have zero visibility, my buddies had disappeared during the descent, I was a very long way from any possible support and I was wondering how to explain all this to my wife, should I ever see her again.

I managed to turn the light on one of my strobes, and by manoeuvring the strobe right next to my face and holding my gauges very close to my mask, I was able to see that I was at 28m depth. My immediate thoughts were not entirely

positive, but I thought follow the rules and wait for a minute or two to see if my buddies find me.

What I should have done, given the fact that I had brought my underwater camera gear all the way from Australia to photograph Qian Dao Lake, was take a photograph—but at that point in time, my self-preservation instinct had overcome any creative impulse!

But let me recreate the scene with the following "artist's impression": I subsequently returned safely to the surface and did another two dives that day, the second being a complete replication of the first but without the camera, and the



third, a kind of navigation exercise following a bearing Leigh provided to get us at the Lion City. I was diving that time with a nice lady from Canada who suggested we hold hands on the way down to avoid the inevitable separation.

On arrival back down on the lake bottom, we commenced the

navigation exercise—which was not easy in almost zero visibility—and after about five minutes of following the bearing we literally bumped into a brick wall. Carefully moving sideways down the wall, we found a corner and carried onwards on the bearing, only to suddenly realise that we may well be inside a building!

other obstruction.

Within 5m, we knew that our path to the surface was clear, and to great relief, made a controlled ascent and safety stop at 5m before getting back to the boat in general agreement that the diving was over for the day and for me—well that was it for the whole weekend, as I saw no

enjoyment in doing it again. On the boat on the way to back to shore, it became obvious why the underwater visibility was so bad. The fishermen explained that the large boat in the distance was actually a dredger—no wonder it was zero visibility on the bottom!

While the diving part of the weekend trip to Qian Dao Lake was memorable for its challenging nature, it was not the most enjoyable set of dives I have ever done. However, the evening spent at the hotel and the drive and ferry trip back to Shanghai

were quite remarkable. It was late afternoon by the time we left the lake on the Saturday, and it was starting to go dark. As we drove back to the hotel, we noticed that there were no lights on in town, and when we did get to the hotel, it was without a single light on. Apparently, power cuts are quite common in this area, as there is an overall power deficit, so the lights are turned off in the remote locations to allow them to stay on in the large cities of Shanghai and Hangzhou.

However, my thoughts were

more on how we would get dinner if there was no power? It turned out that the hotel kitchen staff were able to produce an excellent multiple course meal by candle light using charcoal braziers to cook the food. The only negative being that the beer was warmish, but after a couple of them, it did not seem to matter too much!

Altogether the trip to Qian Dao rates as one of my most unusual ones ever, and yes, I would go again, but I would want to know if that dredger was still operating on the lake first. ■