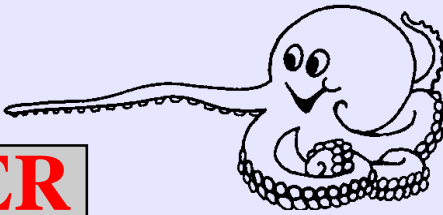


THE REEF SEEKER



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February - 2010



It's that time of the year again when we ask you to join us in Avalon for the annual Avalon Underwater Cleanup, this year celebrating it's 29th anniversary. (The logo -above - is pretty cute too.)

Every year, roughly 500 divers descend on Avalon to scour the bottom for trash and other debris that doesn't belong there. There are three main starting points: the Green Pleasure Pier, Step Beach, and an area around the Underwater Park. As in previous years, we'll be encamped at the Green Pleasure Pier. That's always fun because it's an area that we don't get to dive the rest of the year, and also because you never know what you'll find since it's frequented by boaters who are always losing something over the side.

Once the diving's over there's a raffle and an awards ceremony. There are also many prizes to be won for things you've brought up like smallest, most valuable, oddest, and whatever other what-

did-you-find categories they come up with. There's also the fabled "Ken Kurtis Silver-Tongued Devil Award" that goes to the person who comes up with the most outrageous story behind what it was that they found. (So put you thinking and B.S. caps on when you're hunting for treasure.) But the day's a lot of fun, with proceeds being split between the Catalina Conservancy Divers and the Catalina Hyperbaric Chamber.

If you'd like to go over as part of the Reef Seekers group, all you need to do is call and get signed up. \$125 will cover you for your boat ride (we're on the 6:15AM *Express* out of Long Beach and you can come back at either 3:45PM or 6PM), transport to the Green Pier, Cleanup entry (which includes your t-shirt), and gear storage after the dive is over. Or, you can continue diving in the UW Park if you like and we'll stick you in a cab to get you over there.

Give us a call at 310/652-4990 and join in on the fun.

FROZEN CORALS; DEAD MANATEES

The recent Florida cold snap may have two victims: normally vibrant

corals and cute manatees.

It looks like many shallow-water corals have simply bleached and died as a result of the bitter cold that plagued Florida in January. The main area that hits to have suffered the most damage are the Keys from Key Largo through the Dry Tortugas, covering an area that were considered to be some of the healthiest reefs in North America.

This phenomenon likely doesn't affect deeper-reef corals which are probably protected more by the warm waters of the Gulf Stream. but the shallower corals were in water that was likely to be affected by the cold, the water cooled, and the corals died. the last time cold-water bleaching occurred was in 1977 when it snowed in Miami. That event had a severe impact on Elkhorn and Staghorn corals and even as recently as 2006, it was felt that those two species still hadn't recovered.

So the long-term impact of this is unclear. But the immediate effects are apparently pretty devastating and, give the history, the prognosis doesn't look good.

And on top of that, 77 manatees died as a result of the cold weather and water. The previous high was 56 and that was set last year. So hopefully this cold weather abates.

AIRLINE BAG FEES

I don't think I've met a diver yet who isn't as annoyed as I am at the fees we have to pay extra for baggage. There's simply no way around it, especially since there's only so much you can carry on the plane.

But since baggage fees are a way of life it seems, the least we can do is keep you informed as to who's charging what. So here's a list by airline of current fees (which are obviously subject to change):

Airline	1st	2nd
Alaska	\$15	\$25
American	\$25	\$35
Delta	\$25	\$35
Continental	\$25	\$35
Frontier	\$20	\$30
Hawaiian	\$20	\$30
JetBlue	\$0	\$30
Midwest	\$20	\$30
Northwest	\$25	\$35
Southwest	\$0	\$0
Spirit	\$25	\$25
United Airlines	\$25	\$35
US Airways	\$25	\$35
Virgin America	\$15	\$15



BONAIRE TRIP SHAPING UP

It seems like our trips to Bonaire have become an annual thing and we're looking forward to our return to this diver's paradise May 22-29 (actually leaving LAX late

evening May 21) at Buddy Dive.

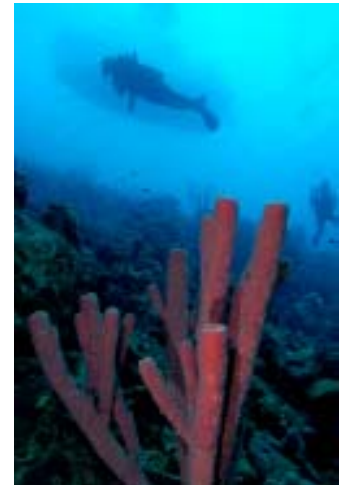
I've got the pricing done and can offer the trip this year for \$1529 (double-occupancy, two bedroom unit) plus airfare. This will cover you for accommodation, a shared rental vehicle, 11 boat dives over the course of the week, unlimited shore diving (the dive on Buddy Reef is excellent and something we do almost every day), full breakfast every day, and up to \$75 in discounts at the restaurants in the resort.

A great perk we're getting this year is their new 3-tank full-day dive to the northern end of Bonaire (they call it the "Washington Slagbaai Safari") on Buddy's new fast catamaran. (Plus they feed you lunch between the second and third dive.) What's nice about this is that it makes accessible to us some dive spots that we've never been able to dive before, because they were out of the range of the 2-tank boats. Plus we'll have our other daily 2-tank boat dives, unlimited shore diving, access to a rental vehicle, and a \$75 meal credit at Buddy's restaurants.

Also remember that if you hold a valid Reef Saver Card (\$25 for the year) or are a member of an affiliated dive club, this is the first of

our foreign trips where the Reef Saver discount of \$5/dive-day now applies. So you could knock \$30 off the cost of this trip which really makes it \$1499 plus airfare.

Right now the airfare on Delta is around \$1100 but I think it will come down (as it did last year). It had been around \$800 but in the past few weeks it went to \$900, then \$1000, then \$1200, and now \$1100. However, they still seem to have the same number of seats available so at some point, they'll likely come back down. (And if you've got miles on Delta, that's an option for you as well to save some money.) We've already got about 8 people signed up for this one so we're a definite "go". Give me a call (310/652-4990) or shoot me an e-mail for more details or to get signed up.



2010 DIVING VACATIONS

March 12-21 • Socorro

May 21-29 • Bonaire

July 9-18 • Yap

EARLY DEPARTURE

We tried something on our January Clemente trip that I'm hoping we'll be able to try again if we have to.

As many of you know, although we schedule things like San Clemente and Santa Barbara, it's all weather-dependent. And when we can't make those islands, the fallback usually is Catalina (assuming we don't have to cancel outright). And what we've done in the past is call everyone and pushed the departure time back to 7AM, like a regularly-schedule Catalina trip would be. But this is problematic on a number of levels, the least of which is the time it takes to call everyone.

For our trip this past Sunday, even though we knew we couldn't make Catalina, we decided to keep the departure time as 12:30AM for a number of reasons.

Leaving at 12:30AM still gave us the option to continue on to Clemente if our information was wrong. But it also meant we pulled into Catalina around 3:30AM. The advantage of that was that if anyone had trouble sleeping on the way over, they'd at least be able to get 3 hours sleep once we anchored up, and wouldn't be quite so tired when we finally started diving at 7AM. This also seemed to resonate well with the folks on the trip. (In fact, it worked out so well, I'm thinking of talking to Tim about moving the Farnsworth departures up to 3AM so we're there at 7AM and we'd simply return earlier to make up for the earlier departure.)

The other nice thing was that we had our pick of dive spots so none of the other days boats had time to

UPCOMING BOAT & SHORE DIVES

Wed	Feb. 3	Redondo	Squid Dive	N/C
Wed	17	Redondo	Squid Dive	N/C
Sat	20	Cat. Express	Avalon U/W Cleanup	\$125
Sun	28	<i>Great Escape</i>	Santa Barbara Island	145/150
Wed	Mar. 3	Redondo	Squid Dive	N/C
Wed	24	Redondo	Squid Dive	N/C
Sun	28	AOP	Diver's Day	FREE!!!
Sat	Apr. 3	<i>Great Escape</i>	Farnsworth/Cat backside	130/135

Prices are listed as 14-day advanced purchase/regular. Food/air included all trips. All diving to be done on compressed air only - no nitrox. Fuel surcharge may apply.

make it over yet. So that meant we were able to anchor up on Little Farnsworth and then moved over to the *Valiant* before we ever saw another boat.

So I think what we'll try to do for this year, is just leave at the appointed hour regardless. (The exception would be when we don't think we'll make Catalina, and then we'll just cancel outright.) In a best-case scenario, we might actually make the intended destination. In a worst-case scenario, we can start diving Catalina at 7AM, and we get you back a bit earlier as well. So it seems like it's win-win all the way.

Give us some feedback on this and let us know if we're on the right track. Just shoot an e-mail to kenkurtis@aol.com and let me know what you think.



SBI ON 2/28

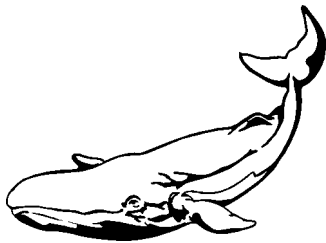
We had a great day at Catalina to close out January and we're looking forward to another great day at

Santa Barbara Island (aka SBI) to close out February.

So this is your "formal" invitation to join us on the *Great Escape* on Sunday, February 28, as we head to the smallest of the Southern Channel Islands. SBI offers some really great diving, lots of sea lions and - as the northernmost of the Southern chain - you start to see a bit of influence of the Northern Channel islands. For instance, years ago you never saw Sunflower Stars south of Anacapa. Now, they're well-entrenched residents of SBI.

As things stand now, we're wide open, which means we've got state-rooms available as well as regular bunks. As always, you know the crew of the *Great Escape* will take good care and you and feed you well, and you know the Reef Seekers DMs will be there to help when you need it and stay out of your way when you don't.

So give us a call to get signed up for this one. The water's a little cooler but the El Nino conditions are keeping it a few degrees warmer than "normal" for this time of the year. And the excitement of diving SBI is enough to get your adrenaline pumping and that alone ought to keep you warm.



WHALES ARE SINGING A DIFFERENT TUNE

It's not a song you'll be hearing on KIIS-FM anytime soon, but researchers have now said that Blue Whales have changed the way they sing their songs. Specifically, they sing in a lower key than they used to. the big question is: What does this mean?

One thought is that there are more whales so the existing whales don't have to sing as hard/loud to be heard. Another thought is that the

whales are being more "manly" with their deeper-pitched songs but I'd like to hear the voice of the researcher who floated that idea before giving it much credence.

A lot of this came about through whale research using Navy submarines. The subs regularly record whale songs and there's apparently a computer program that filters out all the other background ocean noise to hear the whales. But the programmers have to keep changing the code each year because the whales have been lowering their pitch, sometimes very subtly.

One interesting thing in this saga is that researchers discovered tapes of whale songs from 40 years ago that had been stored and forgotten about. When they compared those tapes to current-day songs, they

could definitely hear the difference in pitch with the present-day whales being much deeper-pitched the whales from the 60s. (No "hippie whale" jokes please.)

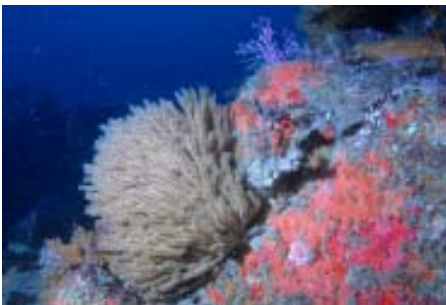
One uplifting thought out of this is that if the lower pitch indicates a rebounding whale population, studying the pitch of whale songs might be an indicator as to population health.

LOBSTER CARDS

Just a quick reminder that if you had a 2009 lobster card, you were supposed to turn them in by yesterday. If that's somehow slipped your mind, I'm sure you can still mail them off. But make sure you get it sent in.

PICTURE PAGE - Catalina, 1/31/10

(All pix by Ken Kurtis © 2010)



**Gorgonian
on the reef**



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**Nice fat
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**Hundreds of
Yellow Anemones**



**Rainbow Star
on the move**



**Rainbow Perch
under the boat**