

It's Water Sports 1992!



Stacy 92

It's Water Sports 1992!

Ring! Ring! It's Time to Hit the Beach and Surf All Morning!

By Frankie Peterson

The alarm clock goes off at 6 a.m. and you look at it without recognition, wondering who planted this strange device in your dreams. The volume of the world as a whole has been turned up several notches and you finally reach over, realizing this is not a dream, and seize the offensive beast. You hurl it against the wall.

Welcome to the world of the surfer.

The next step in your surf session is the five-minute ponder. You are pondering, of course, the eternal question: "Is it going to be worth it for me to get up at this toxic hour, or will I get in my car, drive an hour either north or south (for at this time of the calendar year the waters around Santa Barbara are as flat as, well, flatter than anything you can

think of right now) and discover that there are no waves at all, at which point I will impale myself upon the nearest reasonably sharp object?"

As a surfer, inevitably, you get up. You are next faced with the difficult organizational tasks at hand — namely, cajoling your buddy Farm Boy to accompany you on this pilgrimage. So you call Farm Boy, wake up his roommate, his roommate's girlfriend, and the neighbor's cat because the phone rings 25 times before it is answered, at which point someone drops a heavy, blunt object upon the skull of Farm Boy (this is the only proven way to rouse the *enfant terrible*). Of course, in his stupor, Farm Boy calls you many bad names and tells you to fudge off, and then asks you the other eternal question: "Are we going north or south?"



STACEY TEAS/Daily Nexus

This, the other eternal question, merits serious consideration in and of itself. Often the trip north to Jalama Beach Park concludes in blown-out, sloppy surf — this after a long drive past many, many cows. On occasion, Jalama is simply too big to surf (in the double-overhead plus range). This is not necessarily bad, because then you can either, a) sit on the beach and watch the crazy folks who are trying to make it out past the impact zone as they get pounded or, b) listen to the same kooks

coming in after trying to get out while they tell you about all the great waves they got. Yar!

But the size factor is the key here. Jalama, while it is fickle, is rarely too small to surf. And the crowds there are always a bit lighter than many California beaches.

The other option, of course, is to head south to Ventura and parts thereof. Ventura, like Jalama, is usually blown out by 10 a.m. and it doesn't pick up swells as well. The crowds can be horrendous, the tide is usually wrong, and the water tastes like brown trout soup. But there are several positive factors to the Ventura experience. First of all, there are good taco shops right near both the Santa Clara Rivermouth and Fairgrounds (C Street) breaks, so the classic surf-and-Mexican-food craving can be easily sated. This is key. Secondly, the drive to Ventura is only 40 minutes, as opposed to the full hour required to get to Jalama. Most importantly, the drive down to Ventura provides a great view of the ocean most of the way. So turning around is always an option. On the road to Jalama, you do not get even an inkling of what the waves will be like, and blind faith is a scarce commodity among Santa Barbara surfers.

Now we are past the north-south dilemma. We have somehow managed to

collect the necessary gear (board, wetsuit, wax, mandatory Chevron turpentine cum coffee, Farm Boy, sufficient amount of gas paid for with nickels and pennies) and are arriving at the break of our choice. The waves are surfable at worst and pumping at best. The next eternal question, our third, is: "Do I really want to submerge myself in 60-degree water and possibly lose either my extremities or my future children in pursuit of that elusive nirvana called 'The Green Room'?" Is it true that loss of hearing is a long-term side effect of cold water surfing? Yes, this is true. And there is always the possibility that your hands will be so cold upon emerging from the water that using any type of key apparatus to open and operate a motor vehicle is out of the question. But being that this is summertime and the water is not that cold, the last concern may not apply. But if you have gone north, then this might be a real concern, as the waters of Jalama are rumored to have been piped in directly from Antarctica.

Undoubtedly, being that you are a surfer, you have gone into the water and are now paddling out. Here, the fourth eternal question presents itself: "Do you go for the dry-hair pro-style paddle out so you can look oh-so-cool in the lineup with your perfectly manicured coif, or do you go for

the blood-and-guts, take-no-prisoners, headlong charge for the outside without regard for incoming sets and duck-diving anything that looks like it might be a wave?" Often this point is moot because if there is any size to the swell, you're gonna get wet.

But now that we are past this last decision point and are out in the lineup, we come face-to-face with one of the most gripping controversies ever to confront the surfing world, and ironically, our fifth eternal question: "Do you pee in your wetsuit and, if so, do you like that cozy feeling it gives you?" You non-surfers out there may not understand this, but when you are sitting on your fiberglass wafer-thin mint at 6 a.m., the warm, soothing feeling one gets from a good leak can be reassuring. And if you decide not to pee, do you really think that you can hold it for two or more hours while spending half the time prone on your surfboard, which somehow always manages to press right against your bladder? Well, I think you know where I stand on this issue.

All the work and decisions that you have made up to this point culminate with that exhilarating moment when you drop in on your first wave of the day. The rush of the wind, the saltwater spray, the bodyboarder who took off in front of you and who you have already sliced in half with your fins — but I digress. Sure, there are many unpleasant things about surfing, but I and many others like me get up and go through this ritual several times a week. "Surfing is like a drug," the late, great surfer Kip Bauersfeld told me once in a drunken stupor. "I prefer real drugs because they are easier to control." And if you know what he was talking about, then you are a surfer. If not, give it a try.

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It's Water Sports!

Scuba Diving Is a Self-Contained Good Time!

By Charles Gomer Scott

There's something mysterious about diving into the ocean depths in search of whatever it is that lurks there.

No matter how many Jacques Cousteau specials you've watched, even if you've taken aquatic biology, and yes, despite that glass-bottom-boat ride Uncle Erbie paid for at the family reunion last year on Lake Huron, you'll never know what's down there unless you go look for yourself.

That's what I was ready to do when I made my first trip to the Channel Islands more than six years ago.

I remember it all like it was yesterday, or at least six years ago yesterday. It was a blustery April morning. The *Sea Ventures* dive boat chugged out of Port Hueneme, near Ventura, with its little engines revving. Even though we'd all made the necessary preparations for the trip, most of my companions were nonetheless a bit nervous (!) as we headed into the channel toward Anacapa Island.

Historically, that boat dive was the culminating act of a basic certification course I completed in April 1986. At the same time it symbolized the beginning of a diving career that is sure to continue for some time.

The course I took was run by the university's outdoor recreation division (and still is as far as I've heard, in case you get inspired to take the plunge), so all of our pre-dive sessions took place in the Campus Pool.

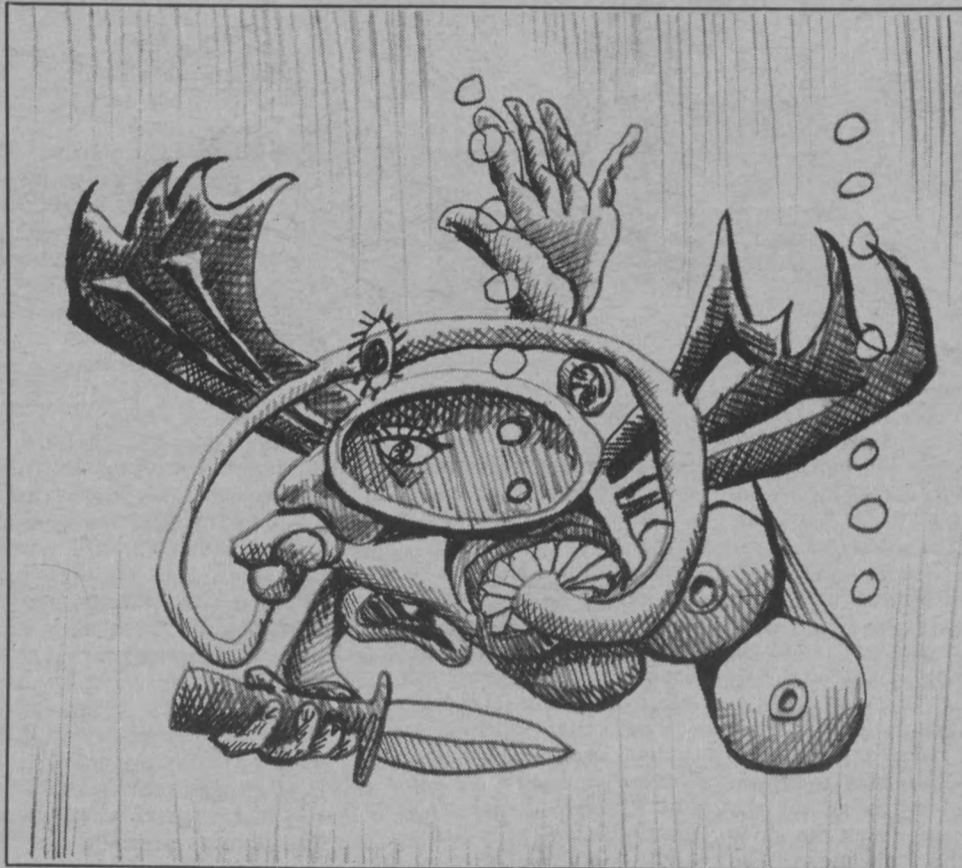
In certain ways those pre-certification pool sessions are some of my favorite diving memories. Like the first time I breathed on scuba underwater. Or the first time I heard sound carry underwater — it travels like you read about; just try popping your fist into your palm and listening the next time you're in a pool!

And naturally, during the pool sessions, we learned buddy breathing and played underwater tag and swam up and down the pool underwater with scuba fins faster than I ever did 50 meters in my life, and that stays with me, too.

Riding a bike to Campus Pool is a hell of a lot different a way to get to your dive site than cruising on the open water at 25 knots on a cloudy, grim morning, especially when you've only had four or five hours of bad sleep.

It was my fault, of course — the sleep bit — because a bunch of people had told me that when one dives from Ventura or Port Hueneme it's easier to sleep on the boat the night before the trip than driving down that morning. And I believed them.

Dummy.



PAT STULL/Daily Nexus

What they neglected to tell me about was the boat's constant motion — all night long — and the mass exodus of ships from the harbor at four in the morning. But when we finally left at 6 a.m., I'd had my "sea legs" for about 10 hours already and was on the deck.

I said the sea was rough and I wasn't kidding. It seemed crazy to me, sitting at the stern as Anacapa Island's rugged features began to appear across the water as the day became light and the fog began to lift, that I'd soon be diving into the choppy water.

We passed within a quarter of a mile of a huge tanker, the biggest ship I'd

ever seen, and the boat's enormous dimensions kicked up the sea like crazy. We were literally surging across the oil-carrier's wake, and the idea of getting into the sea became the more remote.

It all started to seem different when we were close to Anacapa, though. When the *Sea Ventures* hit the island's side, the sea was suddenly calm. And then there was kelp: long, bushy clumps that quickly became stringy stalks heading 40 or 50 feet down to a bottom that was, believe it or not, visible from the boat.

Was I going down there? No way.

We began changing into

wetsuits, checking and re-checking our buddy's gear and our own and thinking about the unknown on the other side — the world below.

My instructor, a grizzled veteran who owns a local dive shop (the name of which I probably shouldn't mention here, in all fairness), knew exactly what to do at this point.

He'd turned us on to the wonders of technology in the pool, drilled us repeatedly on the importance of rigid adherence to our learned skills, and inspired us with his amazing slides and stories of diving adven-

See SCUBA, p.4A

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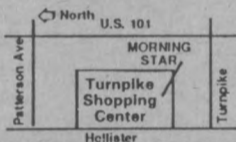


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Continued from p.3A
tures. Now he had to convince us to go through with what we'd started.

First he checked our gear, then he cracked a joke. Well, a diving joke anyway.

"Now remember to keep in touch with your buddy about your oxygen. How much do I have left if I do this?" he asked, holding up all 10 of his fingers.

"1,000 psi," my buddy answered, forgetting that the instructor had lost half a finger to a moray eel.

"950!" I corrected, and we all laughed, a little more at ease.

The divemaster that day was one of our assistant instructors. Her job was to plan out what we'd be doing and how we'd be doing it. Everything, from where to enter the water to the dive plan and even what we would do when we were down there, was left up to her.

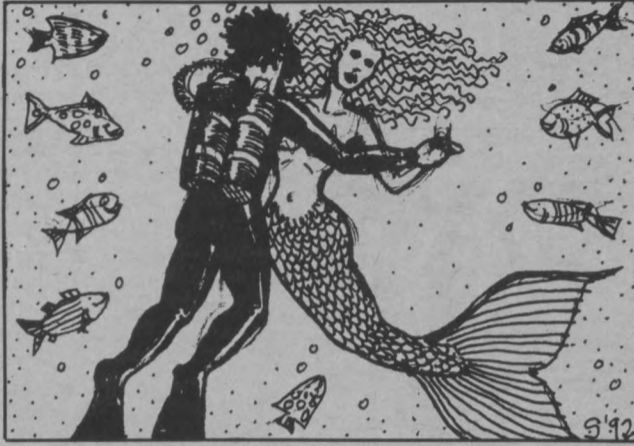
Because these were our first dives, there would need to be a bunch of skill checks. None of us had ever equalized pressure below the pool's 18- or 20-foot depth, and we'd previously been using a guide rope and going down one at a time with the instructor, directly below the boat.

I jumped off the boat's backside after about half the class had already gone — a perfect entry! — and immediately signaled the divemaster that I was OK by tapping my hand on top of my head. When my buddy entered, we kicked slowly toward the rope buoy, snorkeling to conserve air and anxiously awaiting descent.

Before I knew it, I was on the bottom, once again flashing OK signs everywhere — and then it hit me: I was 45 feet down! (!) And using a self-contained underwater breathing apparatus! (!) There were fish everywhere — big fish, little fish, orange fish, square-headed fish (!) — man, were there fish!

We were all kneeling, waiting for the rest of the class and then we were all looking up, past the kelp that was surrounding us, past the bottom of the boat, with its two propellers slowly turning above us, and even past the blue sky above the surface. I could see the clouds.

One of scuba diving's cardinal rules, sort of the Ten Commandments or something, is "Thou shalt never hold thy breath." In layperson's terms this means that



STACEY TEAS/Daily Nexus

if you're not inhaling, you're exhaling, and the collective bubbles my class was emitting created quite a picture from the ocean bottom.

Have you ever heard of "surge?" Not Serge, the guy who wanted to make an espresso with a lemon twist for Eddie Murphy in *Beverly Hills Cop*, but surge, the way the ocean constantly moves below the surface. I was used to the placid unmoving waters of a pool, and suddenly there was this movement pushing me this way, that way, everywhere except right in place, which is where I was supposed to stay.

We did the tests. We buddy-breathed. We practiced our buoyancy by

changing the amounts of air in our jackets. Negative to be heavy, and sink like a stone, like Jimmy Hoffa must've with those cement boots on (!), and then positive to float, and head for the surface, like, well, something full of air.

And then all of our favorite, really any diver's favorite: neutral buoyancy, that amazing condition of hovering in the water column like a fish that enables you to move around freely, like fish do. You'll have to trust me, it's a bit hard to describe.

After all the skills had been checked, we crept toward a rock reef. Try to imagine having 75-foot visibility underwater, swim-

ming toward a sea of purple and orange and red urchins, looking casually toward the fish that swam by you just as casually as you passed them, and then suddenly confronting an electric ray.

They look just like the infamous sting ray, *sans* stinger. Instead, these nasty critters have an electric charge which they use in self-defense, by first turning onto their sides, then hanging vertically in the air, quivering and quaking and finally they zap you. (Should you ever confront one of these most territorial of ocean dwellers, get out of the way — quickly.)

Since I'm here writing this you can tell we managed to avoid this fate, but a couple of my buddies were scared to death by the experience. The instructor said it's pretty rare to have that kind of encounter, and there it was happening on my first dive.

I swam with a seal on another dive that day, and combed across a reef looking for empty abalone shells — which made great souvenirs for my friends — and that ever-hidden moray eel. I finally found one and it must've been eight feet long.

Talk about being scared. I'm cruising along a ledge,

without a flashlight, because first-time divers don't know from jack about that kind of accessory, and suddenly I see a cool little blue fish. I'm studying it meticulously, like you'd look into a fish tank, and then I looked up.

Big Moray Eel Looking Me In The Face And Thinking Dinner — Aaaaahh!

I lived, and didn't even lose a finger, but was it ever a thrill!

I suppose every diver could wax philosophical about his or her first dive for hours. As I said, it's the end of one thing and the beginning of another.

Since April of '86, I've done more than 50 dives. I've gone to the Channel Islands about once a year, I've dived at night, I've done beach dives and lake dives, tropical dives in Mexico and the Red Sea, seen sharks and seals, and taken a fair share of game. (Spearfishing beats the hell out of conventional angling any time, even if I still have yet to take any abalones for my dad.)

And still that first dive is etched in my memory and it probably will always be. If you've done it, you know what I mean, and if you haven't, what are you waiting for?

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