

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

THE DEEPEST DIVE FIRST ?

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Dear Editor

I read Bob Halstead's *Asking the right questions* in Dive Log (see page 174). I had never heard of people doing deep bounce dives early in the day intentionally until I spent a month at Cairns last year. Although I had previously dived in Queensland at Mooloolaba, Lady Elliot Island and a lot around the Gold Coast there had never been any pressure to be absolutely strict with doing the deepest dive first.

Although I always plan to do my deepest dive first, it sometimes is not possible and you have to make an informed calculation of how much risk you are at. In North Queensland it got to ridiculous levels but I learnt quickly from the more experienced divers there. Every dive became a bounce dive slightly shallower than the last. Some divers just lied about their depth and times until even they were getting confused. I felt that instead of adding to safety it was rather dangerous.

On one live-aboard with a lot of new and learning divemasters as the staff, we all had a dive on a shallow reef under the boat one morning about 0830. The absolute maximum depth was 6.5 m and most of the dive was about a metre higher than that. When we came on board we, along with at least a dozen others, were told we were not allowed to dive again until tomorrow and we would have to snorkel. There were a lot of unhappy people. One young lad was unable to complete his Advanced course because of it. My wife and I were really pissed off and got a day boat back to Cairns and lost a couple of hundred dollars we had paid out for another night and day.

This was the same live-aboard that had tried to fine me because I had my mask on top of my head. I was putting my reg on my tank at the time on board the boat, a long way from the water, when the young divemaster started crying out "Diver in Distress! Diver in distress!" I actually looked around to see what was happening. It still makes me angry at their stupidity of following rules blindly. My wife tells me to lighten up and let it go.

On a day dive about a week later I was told, after arriving at the site, that I would have to pay an additional \$15 to join a guided tour as I did not have my own buddy. (My wife had an ear infection at the time.) We went down to 15.5 m in a big circle and returned to the boat after 20 minutes, as most were running out of air (small aluminium tanks).

An experienced American diver and myself had plenty of air left and we were instructed to buddy up and dive over the shallow reef at the rear of the boat. My wife was snorkelling here and every now and then gave us a little wave as she looked down on us. Maximum depth here was 5 m but much was in 3.5 m. We just pottered around looking in holes etc. Much more like a snorkel than a dive. We spent 43 minutes in the water all up. When we came back on board they banned my buddy from diving again that day. It was only after a number of protests that he was allowed back in later that afternoon. He told me that for the rest of his trip here he would lie about his depths and times.

After a number of other day dives with different operators, I went out with Nimrod III and had a great time. I still did the bounce dives but I may not have had to as they seemed a very sensible outfit with an experienced and slightly older (40ish) divemaster. Many a dive was reported as 25 m when we actually dived at the 14-18 metre mark.

My wife and I try to be careful and safe in our diving. We do not take unnecessary risks. My wife and I also do longish safety stops of at least 5 minutes and usually 10 minutes or more if the dive was deep. We usually have to inform the divemaster as they become concerned if you hang around on the mooring rope longer than 3 minutes. It all may not help but it will not hurt. The point is we try to keep within safe levels.

Stephen Bilson.

Key Words

Environment, recreational diving, risk, safety

Editor's comment

This letter was sent to Bob Halstead who passed it and his paper ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS to the Journal. As readers know, Bob has little time for many regulations applied to the Queensland diving industry, which, in his opinion, have the effect of interfering with sensible diving. Anything which has the effect of making divers lie about their depths and times to be allowed to dive seems unlikely to increase diving safety

While there is evidence that doing the deepest dive last is associated with decompression illness (DCI) we do not know the actual risk of doing the deep dive last. Neither do we usually know the depth and times of the dives (nitrogen load) which preceded the final deep dive. This information is seldom published.