

THE REEF SEEKER



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IT'S CLEANUP TIME!!!

Plans are well underway for the 37th Annual Avalon Underwater Cleanup, which will take place on Saturday, February 24. Reef Seekers will be there with a (small) contingent of divers and non-divers. If you've never done the event before, here's what to expect.

First of all, a beautiful day. I don't know how she does it, but event chair Jill Boivin seems to arrange for perfect weather every year. It might be pouring rain and howling wind the next day, but the Saturday after President's Day is always picture-perfect. Sort of like the weather for the Rose Parade. And, like the Rose Parade, one year conditions were terrible and we had to postpone but other than that, it's been smooth sailing.

The goal of the event is to pick up trash in the Avalon harbor area. This means we get to dive from areas that are usually off-limits: around and under the Green Pier (where we will be stationed), off

of Step Beach, and from the harbor side of Casino Point (so, NOT the Park). When you sign up - and be aware the event is limited to 500 divers - you choose where you want to dive, indicate a group if you're affiliated with anyone, and you're good to go. In previous years we'd had a group diving Lover's Cove (over by the Mole) but there's been limited interest so that location has, at least temporarily, been retired.

Because the event starts at 9:30AM, we need to hop an early boat out of Long Beach to get over to Avalon. (Of course, you can go Friday night if you also want to shell out for a hotel.) The most convenient boat to take is the 6:00AM one, which then also leaves us time for breakfast. There's also an 8:15AM out of LB which will be cutting it pretty close but is doable. But don't wait to get your reservation made because both boats are about 75% full as of this writing.

Once you check in (if you're part of our group, I check everyone in at once so you don't need to stand in line), the next order of business will be at 9AM with the formal dive briefing. We'll go over the ins and outs of the event, as well as reminding you how to deal with the trash once you bring it back in.

Now don't lose sight of the fact

that this is a fun day so that means there are prizes to be had for various forms of the trash. The categories are somewhat free-form so don't assume what was a category last year will again be one this year. One category that WON'T be offered is "Heaviest" because we don't want to encourage people to go find heavy items. Too much diver risk. But things like Smallest, Weirdest, Most Perverted, and other categories have been awarded in the past.

When you come up and turn in your trash, there will be volunteers at that spot who are looking for the story behind your trash. That's how you get these prizes. So if you find something unusual, make sure they know about and have your name because you never know when trash from the ocean might actually become valuable.

And just because you found something routine, don't think it may not qualify for prize. Because there's always (and this really IS the official name) "The Coveted Ken Kurtis Silver-Tongued Devil Award" goes to the person or buddy team that spins the best story behind the trash that they found. We generally try to get one entry from each of the dive locations, but that's not carved in stone. I MC the thing and the crowd votes. It can be a vicious crowd at times and they show no mercy. So my

best advice is to keep your story relatively short (two minutes-ish), have it move from A to B to C to D in a logical fashion, and end with a punch line. Like I said, the crowd votes with their applause and decision of the judges (me) is final.

Diving is over with at 11AM. If you come with us, you can then decide that you're done for the day and we'll have your gear stored over at the Mole, or you can decide to continue diving and we'll get a taxi that will take you over to the Underwater Park.

You're on your own for lunch but gather around the stage at 1PM as that's when the awards ceremony begins. Again, a fairly informal affair with lots of prizes to give away, trash awards handed out, the afore-mentioned Silver-Tongued Devil Award, as well as the two more serious awards: Jon Hardy (recognizing someone who has promoted diving at Catalina), and the Golden Flipper (recognizing someone who's given great effort in helping organize/run/staff the event). The awards ceremony is generally over sometime between 2:30PM and 3PM.

Remember that the monies raised are split between two very good causes: Catalina Conservation Diver, who do lots of underwater research about Catalina, and the Catalina Hyperbaric Chamber.

So if you'd like to have some fun and contribute to a good cause, whether you're going to dive or not, give us a call at 310/652-4990 and get signed up. If you're diving, \$150 gets you covered for the Express ride over and back, taxis, entry fee, and fun. (If you're not diving \$100 will do the trick.) Hope to see you in Avalon in a few

weeks, on February 24, for the 37th Annual Avalon Underwater Cleanup.



SQUID BACK AT REDONDO

We're getting scattered reports of the squid showing back up at Redondo and specifically Vets Park. Given that the full moon was January 31, the next two weeks might be an excellent time to catch them in the acting of mating. Of course, even a daytime dive will reveal the thousands and thousands of egg clusters that they've been laying (and the first batch should be close to hatching) but there's nothing like having the squid so thick that you can barely see your dive buddies. It is truly a unique experience.

HOW ABOUT SOME WHALE SHARKS?

Our Bonaire and Yap trips are filling nicely, so perhaps it's time to get you thinking about Isla Mujeres and specifically, Whale Sharks.

As you likely know, Whale Sharks are the largest fish in the world. And Isla Mujeres serves as ground zero each year for the largest known annual congregation of said animals, with as many as (estimated) 800 of them around. Bottom line is that we can almost guarantee you will have a Whale Shark in your face.

I find this to be a relatively relaxing trip because we're doing something different every day (snorkeling with the Whale Sharks x 3, cenotes, reefs, and the Cancun Underwater Museum). With the exception of the cenotes day, most days we're finished up in the mid-afternoon, so there's plenty of time to relax and unwind (or look at the fabulous stills and videos you got of the Whale Sharks).

Airfare is around \$700 on United and the land portion usually prices out around \$2,500 (still working on that). But if you're interested, e-mail or call us at 31/652-4990.

2018 DIVING VACATIONS

April 14-22 • Bonaire

June 8-20 • Yap Immersion

July 14-28 • Sulawesi, Indo

August 18-25 • Isla Mujeres

CLEAR WATER'S NOT ALWAYS GOOD

There was an interesting article last week in the L.A. Times about some changes going on in Lake Michigan that really helps to underscore what a complex environment the underwater world can be. I have fond memories of Lake Michigan both from when I was a kid living in Chicago's south side, as well as when I was a student at Northwestern University, which butted right up against the shoreline of Lake Michigan. But back then, it was not exactly an inviting place to jump into. Not only was the water cold, but it was brown and dirty. Not any more.

It seems that 20 years or so ago, mussels started coming in on ships that were plying the waters of the lake. Even back then, some environmentalists raised concerns that this could spell trouble down the road. Needless to say, their warnings were not heeded.

It's now estimated that there are trillions of mussels in Lake Michigan and they are constantly filtering the water of the lake through them. In fact, and I found this quite amazing, the mussels collectively can filter the entire volume of Lake Michigan in four or five days. That's pretty impressive. It also means that, in the last 20 years, Lake Michigan has gone from brown to blue. And that might be troubling.

One of the reasons the lake has gotten clearer - and don't forget that this is fresh water, not salt water - is that the mussels filter out and eat the phytoplankton which has formed the basis for life in Lake Michigan. Zooplankton ate the phytoplankton, small fish ate

UPCOMING LOCAL DIVES & CLASSES

DAY	DATE	BOAT/SITE	PLANNED DESTINATION	PRICE
Sat.	Feb. 3	Veterans Park	Beach dive (single tank)	\$25
Thu.	8	Veterans Park	••• Squid Dive •••	FREE!!!
Sat.	10	Catalina Express	Avalon UW Park	\$150
Sat.	24	Catalina Express	37th Avalon UW Cleanup	\$150
Thu.	Mar. 1	--- CLASS ---	- Photo Workshop -	\$25
Sat.	10	Aqrm of Pacific	Diver's Day	FREE!!!
Sat.	17	Catalina Express	Avalon UW Park	\$150
Thu.	22	Vets - Redondo	••• Squid Dive •••	FREE!!!

the zooplankton, medium fish ate the small fish, and larger fish ate the medium fish. But once you diminish the phytoplankton, you upset that delicate balance. In short, the food web could totally collapse.

The other interesting unintended consequence of clearer water comes from the increased visibility. Fish who previously had to hunt prey somewhat blind due to the visibility, now can see their prey from further away. Even the fisherman say it's put them at a disadvantage, because the fish can now see there's a boat overhead dangling a lure, rather than just seeing something flash in the water and they hit it and are caught.

There's an interesting parallel here (I think) between that and what we saw when we visited Easter Island in 2011.

Easter Island is considered one of the most isolated inhabited places on earth. It's 2,300 miles to Chile and 2,600 miles to Tahiti, the two closest outposts of civilization. And for reasons unknown, the waters surrounding Easter Island have some of the lowest concentrations of plankton to be found anywhere in the world. It also means that the water, because it's devoid of plankton, can be very clear, with visibility up to 200 feet not uncommon. And that's the parallel to what's happening in sud-

denly (relatively speaking) much cleaner/clearer Lake Michigan.

At Easter Island, because there's very little plankton, there aren't a lot of fish. You can find them, but it takes a bit of work. The corals are very healthy, but they don't depend on plankton for their survival. Fish on the other hand . . .

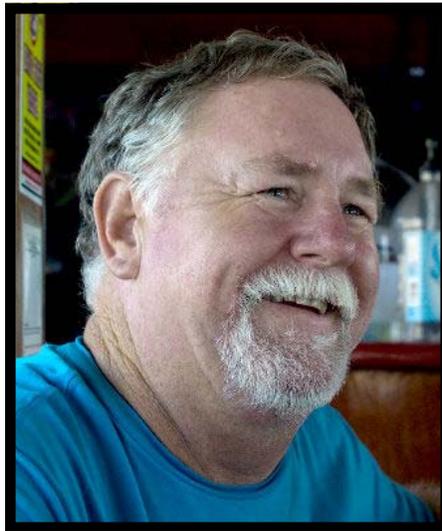
And so what we see at Easter Island is very similar to what's happening in Lake Michigan. You may still have variety, but you lose sheer numbers of any given species.

My guess - purely that - would be that the situation in Lake Michigan will stabilize, but that everything will be at a low end, much as it is at Easter Island. Fishing practices may change, and perhaps something will come in to munch on the mussels and will hold them in check. Studies now are even suggesting the mussel population may have peaked and is even declining, showing a 40% decrease over the last few years, basically because they ate all the food and now there are too many of them to survive in such large numbers. But the ones that are surviving are getting bigger, and what that means for the future is still open to conjecture.

I'm reminded of one of the great statements in cinema history, from Jeff Goldblum in *Jurassic Park*, "Nature finds a way." Stay tuned.

INTERESTED IN INDO?

FYI, if you've been thinking about our Indonesia trip July 14-28, the time to act might be now. I just got a note from the folks at Murex and they're starting to fill up. So I can only hold rooms without having to send them money for so long. (or we change to different dates.) As you may know from reading our past reports, we love going there and have a fabulous time. And this is planned as 8 days of diving including a trip to the famous Lembeh Straits. But business is business for both of us. So if this is something you're contemplating, give me a call at 310/652-4990 to let me know where you are in the thought process because the time is coming when we have to book or get off the pot.



(Photo courtesy of Chris Grossman)

MEMORIAL SERVICE FOR TIM BURKE

As man of you may already know, Captain Tim Burke (*Great Escape*) died suddenly last month. A memorial service is being organized

by the crews of the *Great Escape* and the *Cee Ray*.

It will be held on Saturday, February 11, at Queen's Wharf (same place the *Cee Ray* and the *West-erly* leave from), which is 555 Pico Blvd., also known as Berth 55. The memorial will start somewhere around 1PM and run until 4PM-ish. It'll be informal and will be held in the dining area of the restaurant at Queen's Wharf. There will be some food and you can purchase alcohol or soft drinks at the adjacent bar. No RSVP is necessary and if you have questions or perhaps some photos of Tim - they would like to do a memory board - those can be directed to Captain Kim Lancaster of the *Cee Ray* at her e-mail address of ceeraydiveboat@gmail.com.

PICTURE PAGE - Avalon Cleanup from 2017

(All pix by Ken Kurtis © 2018)



**Getting
ready**



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WWW.REEFSEEKERS.COM



**Kayak Patrol
in position**



**And . . .
they're off!!!**



**New
hoods**



**Checking
back in**