

The Skin Diver

A MAGAZINE FOR
SKIN DIVERS AND SPEARFISHERMEN



Featuring---

NOVEMBER SPEARFISHING AT LA PAZ

By Ronald Drummond

CALIFORNIA SHEEPSHEAD

By Conrad Limbaugh

MIDWINTER SKIN DIVING DERBY

THE PEARL DIVERS OF HIKUERU

By Don Clark

CLUB NEWS FROM —

The Seals of Santa Barbara
Muirmen

Santa Anita Neptunes

Bottom Scratchers

Los Angeles Neptunes

Sea-Downers

Dolphins

Southern Calif. Skin Divers

DECEMBER

Photo By Larry Kronquist, Laguna Beach

First Issue

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EDITORCHUCK BLAKESLEE
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Published at 11102 Virginia Avenue, Lynwood, California each month for the purpose of creating a further interest in skin diving and spearfishing and to provide an advertising medium for manufacturers and retail merchants of equipment used by underwater fishing and hunting enthusiasts. DEADLINE for advertising, feature material and photographs of January, 1952 issue — January 5.

This is an Editorial??

After several months of collecting material, ideas and data on our sport we are presenting to you this first issue of THE SKIN DIVER. You as a skin diver will find this magazine interesting from cover to cover because it was compiled, written and published with you as its reader. We hope you enjoy it.

The name of THE SKIN DIVER was picked because it includes everyone interested and participating in underwater fishing and hunting. Our policies are few and can be readily adjusted according to the trend or season. We make no claims on our journalistic talents therefore THE SKIN DIVER has many writers — all experts — not necessarily experts at writing but experts on the subject written about. If you have a message of interest to the skin diver notify us and we will be glad to publish it.

If your club or organization is not represented in this issue contact your publicity chairman and give him the word. We want to publish any and all items of interest to our skin diving readers, complete credit is given to authors and photographers. Club news is important to club members and also serves as a means of exchanging ideas and methods between the many skin diving clubs.

OUR ADVERTISERS

Voit Rubber Co., Rene Sports of Westwood, The Spearfisherman, Sea-Net Mfg., Inc., Fisher Sporting Goods and the charter boat "Maray" are all manufacturers and retail salesmen of skin diving equipment. The advertisers in THE SKIN DIVER make or sell everything in the way of gear a skin diver needs to enjoy our sport. Without them this magazine would still be a dream, patronize them and above all else mention that you saw their advertisement in THE SKIN DIVER. We will appreciate it and they will want to know that their advertisement was published in a medium that went direct to the skin diving customer. Also if you know of any one who makes or sells equipment or performs some service for skin divers and they are not advertisers as mentioned here let us know and we will contact them.

ON THE COVER

Our cover picture for this month is Doctor Nelson E. Mathison and White Sea Bass speared at Laguna Beach, California. Doc is well known in Southern California as a big fish getter, this bass being one of several for the Doc this past season. Doc is Vice President of the Los Angeles Neptunes and was a member of their team in the last National Meet. THE SKIN DIVER extends many thanks to Doc for securing the four page feature on November Spearfishing in La Paz and the wonderful cooperation he has shown us in our struggle to get underway.

OUT OF THE MAIL BOX

John G. Carter, President of the MINNESOTA SKIN DIVERS, writes that their activities are at a standstill due to their Minnesota lakes freezing over . . . Harold J. Aycock of the PALM BEACH UNDERWATER SPEARFISHING CLUB (Florida) sends congrats to the magazine and reports that their associate members are now arriving in Florida for the winter . . . Vi Potts, SEA NYMPHS President, reports a new member into their club of feminine skin divers, she is Miss Pat Gallagher, a student at San Diego State College and a candidate in the Marine Reserve . . . Department of Fish and Game Patrol Captain Robert G. Keneen writes of recent legislation legalizing the use of self-contained units for the spearing of fish and the taking of lobsters in season (California).

SUBSCRIPTIONS

On Page Eleven you will notice the Subscription Blank and the price of one year's or twelve issues of THE SKIN DIVER. This price will bring THE SKIN DIVER to your address, no matter where you are, for twenty-five cents per issue. As THE SKIN DIVER's circulation grows the yearly subscription rate will decrease accordingly. Send in your subscription blank immediately so you will receive the January issue, if there is no blank available send us your remittance of three dollars with your mailing address and you will receive the next issue. Thank you and Seasons Greetings from THE SKIN DIVER.

MIDWINTER SKIN DIVING DERBY

On December 15, 1951 the first annual Skin Diving Derby will be underway. Underwater fishermen and women from Monterey to San Diego will be exploring the kelp beds and underwater reefs for big fish, abalone, lobster and etc. in an effort to win one of the prizes being offered. Competition will be keen as some of the world's best underwater men will be trying their luck against all comers. The contest is open to any licensed fisherman over eighteen and the cost is only one dollar. The prizes consist of Aqua Lungs, Rubber Suits, Spears, Guns, Masks, Flippers and a variety of other equipment amounting to almost a thousand dollars.

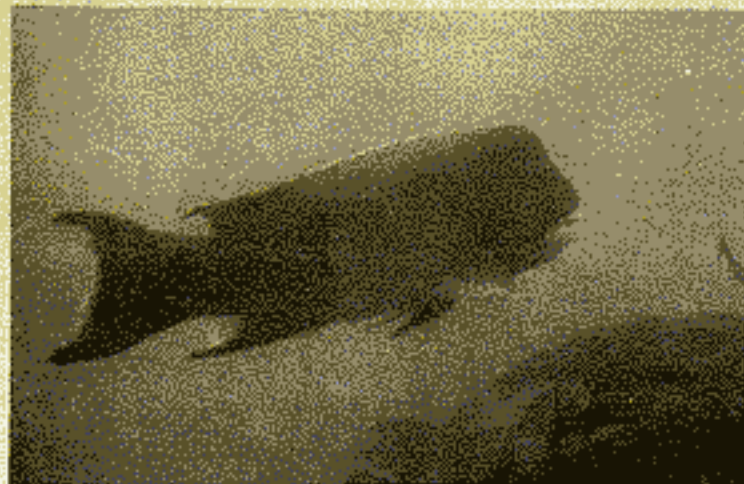
The idea for the Derby originated with Phil Nourse during a meeting of the West Los Angeles Neptunes. The Laguna Contest was under discussion and most of the members objected to the idea of a lot of divers entering the water at the same time and at the same place. President Clint Harte and Vice President Bill Barada took the idea up with Rene Sports, Voit Rubber Company, and Sea Net Mfg. Co. who gave a lot of enthusiastic support as well as donating valuable prizes. The D. L. Davis Co. and all of the retail stores cooperated wholeheartedly.

This first attempt was a rush job but we think the idea is sound and it holds out hope for a means of enlisting the aid of all the divers behind legislation and conservation measures designed to help the sport. We are keenly aware of the fact that most skin divers are individualists and that the sport is not considered seriously by other groups. Our voice is pitifully small and weak among groups such as the Southern Council of Conservation clubs and the Ocean Fish Protective League but with this Derby as a means of building a war chest we may be able to make ourselves heard.

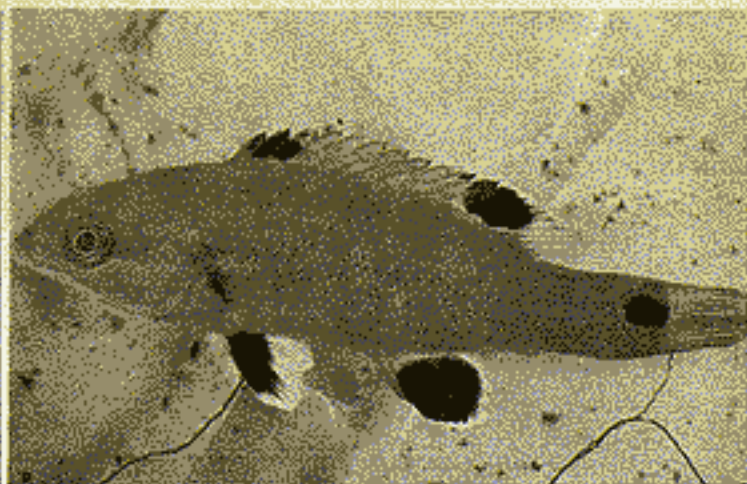
It is our purpose that any surplus money collected will be turned over to a committee representing all Skin Diving Clubs in Southern California, and is to be used to promote, through the proper channels, the opening of a summer lobster season for the sport fishing of male lobsters only.

SHARKS SEE SUB

The Ingle Aire Sharks aboard the charter boat "Maray" on November 13, were given a thrill when a U. S. Submarine made a crash-dive within 100 yards of the boat. It took less than one minute for the sub to completely submerge except for the periscope. Unfortunately no one had a movie camera.



A large adult male Sheephead.



A young Sheephead 1 1/2" long.

California Sheephead

BY CONRAD LIMBAUGH

Conrad Limbaugh is a graduate student at the University of California's Scripps Institution of Oceanography. In the course of his studies he has spent much time diving and studying the fish life in the kelp beds. Above photographs courtesy of Conrad Limbaugh and Scripps.

The sheephead is one of the most colorful of the large fishes commonly speared by skin divers along the coast of California. Its bizarre shape, its large size and its abundance in the shore waters has made it one of the best known of our local fishes.

The sheephead is a member of the wrasse family, Labridae. Two smaller members of this family, senoritas (*Oxyjulis californica*) and rock wrasse (*Halichoeres semicinctus*) also occur along the California coast. This family is much better represented in all the tropical waters. The brilliant colors and varied shapes of the tropical members rival those of birds and butterflies.

Sheephead may be found from Pacific Grove, Monterey Bay to lower Baja California. They inhabit the rocky areas and are quite common south of Point Conception. They seldom leave the rocky areas and will not venture up from the bottom except in the kelp.

The males and females are quite different in appearance. The maturing males develop a large fleshy hump on the top of the head which increases in size as the fish grows older.

The males are usually brilliantly colored whereas the females are drab. The males are bluish black except for the central portion of the body which is a brilliant red or pink band. The crimson or pink appears white to the skin diver in deeper water because the water absorbs the red light. The movements of this fish may be traced in the weak light of a cave or in murky water by the very white chin. Over light sand in shallow water a male sheephead may assume a very light uniform pink color. This makes the fish less

conspicuous against the light background of the sand.

The females are less conspicuously colored. They change their color with their background. They may vary their color from almost black to a light pink, sometimes with irregular bars. Females taken in deeper water are usually a uniform dull red above and pink below.

This rather chunky fish attains a weight up to 35 pounds. The average weight, however, is probably less than ten pounds. Males are usually larger and heavier than the females.

It is a solitary fish, although occasionally it may be observed with schools of other fish where it is probably attracted by the activity.

Moving almost constantly (apparently aimlessly) it employs the use of its pectoral fins exclusively. When in a hurry it uses its powerful tail. This apparently aimless movement is over a path which is already familiar to the fish, and provides suitable crevices for hiding. One spear scarred male was observed at nearly the same spot for a number of years by members of the "Bottom Scratchers" club at La Jolla.

Sheephead are curious and congregate around commercial abalone divers as they work, nipping the abalone as they are removed from the rocks or even entering the diver's bag of abalone. They become a further nuisance by causing the abalone to clamp against the rocks before the diver can get an iron under them.

The food of the sheephead includes a variety of mollusks, crustaceans and sea urchins. Opening the stomach of this fish will reveal the crushed shells of these animals. The large canine-like

teeth are used to pry these animals from the rocks. A special crushing plate located in the throat crushes the shells into small pieces so that they will not interfere with digestion.

The life span of this fish is apparently quite long. A specimen lived in the Steinhart Aquarium in San Francisco for over twenty years. They probably mature at the age of three years at a size from 11 to 14 inches for the female and slightly larger for the male.

Spawning occurs in the summer time. Nothing is known of their spawning habits or the very early stages of the fishes' life.

Young ones an inch long appear in December. They do not resemble their parents. They are brilliant red-orange with two black spots in their dorsal fin, a black spot at the base of their tail fin. The pelvic and anal fins are black trimmed in white. They live close to the rocks at depths usually greater than twenty feet. When disturbed they seek shelter among the red seaweed or the gorgonian corals.

By the following summer they are three to four inches in length and have faded. The brilliant red-orange becomes a dull pink. At the age of two years they are six to eight inches in length and have lost all their spots. At this size both males and females resemble adult females.

Spearing Sheephead

Equipped with protruding canine-like teeth which do not add to its beauty this harmless rather heavy bodied fish with its rather unconcerned attitude has been known to throw terror into skin divers unfamiliar with its habits.

The unexpected vitality of this sluggish looking fish has sent many a spearfisherman home with only a tale of the large sheephead that got away.

Types of spears and methods of spearing vary with the individual sportsman. The tough skin and the large scales interfere with the penetra-

(Continued on Page 4)

CALIFORNIA SHEEPSHEAD (Con't)

tion of a spear and many a skin diver has lost a good fish dinner because of this.

In shallow water sheepshead are difficult to approach and will seek shelter in the rock crevices. In water deeper than 20 feet, they are apparently not so easily frightened. In any case the diver should screen himself as he makes his approach with any available cover such as kelp, rocks or the white water caused by the ocean's turbulence.

Chumming is a successful technique employed by many divers. Fresh abalone, crushed sea urchins, mussels or crabs will attract these fish in a matter of minutes. The best results are obtained when the chum is placed in water deeper than 15 feet and where suitable cover is afforded the diver.

During lobster season some skin divers take advantage of the lobster traps. Sheepshead are attracted to the traps where they pull off the protruding legs of the lobster. By swimming from float to float a diver may observe a number of fair sized sheepshead. If he is sufficiently skilled and water conditions are right he can easily secure from 35 to 100 pounds of fish in a day.

The flesh of the sheepshead is considered by some to be of poor quality. However, skinned, filleted and cooked while still fresh, it will compare in flavor with the best of fish.

The End

Charters

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MIDWINTER SKIN DIVERS DERBY

For Affiliated and Non-Affiliated
Spearfishermen

RULES

Entry blank must be obtained before 12:00 noon December 15, 1951. Fee \$1.00. Available at local sporting goods stores.

Entries checked until 12:00 noon January 15, 1952.

Catches shall be recorded by weight and species; exception, abalone, which shall be measured by greatest length. Photographs of catches should be submitted whenever possible for publicity use.

Catch may be taken in any legal manner for underwater spearfishing by skin divers or with breathing apparatus. Diver must be in water and underwater at time catch is made. Catch must be witnessed by at least one other registered contestant. Entries accepted at listed check stations only. All catches must be fresh — not cleaned or cooked.

Derby is open to any licensed underwater skin diver over 18 years of age. Catch must be taken in coastal waters of Southern California from Monterey Creek to the Mexican Border. No one contestant may win more than one prize.

Contest judges are to be three members: One from Sea Net Manufacturing Company, one from Rene's Sporting Goods, and one from Voit Rubber Company. Decision of judges is to be final. Place and date to be announced later.

CHECK STATIONS

- Aggie's Sporting Goods
504 Pine Avenue, Long Beach 12
- Catalina Hardware
Avalon, California
- Divers Supply
1150 Wilmington Blvd., Wilmington
- La Jolla Sporting Goods
1051 Wall Street, La Jolla
- Lou Bello's Sporting Goods
San Luis Obispo
- Ott's Hardware
Santa Barbara
- Prodon & Foote Sporting Goods
117 South Pacific Coast Highway
Redondo Beach
- Ray & Al's Sporting Goods Store
290 Forest Avenue, Laguna Beach
- Rene's
1045 Broxton Ave., West Los Angeles
- Sports & Hobbies
702 Cass Street, Monterey
- Stanley Andrews Sporting Goods
1144 Third Avenue, San Diego
- Union Distributing Co.
281 West Sixth Street, San Pedro

FISH & GAME CODE

(California)

SECTION 794 — It is unlawful to take any abalone, the shell of which, measured in greatest diameter, is less than the following specifications: Red Abalone, seven inches; Green Abalone, six and one-quarter inches; Pink Abalone, six inches; Black Abalone, five inches.

From SECTION 792 — Abalone season is open from March 16 to January 14. Limit is 5 per day per diver. Fishing license is required.

From SECTION 971 — Spiny Lobster may be taken in any district by the use of the hands in the manner commonly known as skin diving or by use of diving apparatus of the type commonly known as the aqua-lung, provided, that spiny lobster so taken in District 19A may not be sold.

SECTION 782 — Spiny Lobster may be taken between October 1 and March 15.

SECTION 783 — No Spiny Lobster less than ten and one-half inches in length may be taken, possessed, sold or purchased.

HANDLE WITH CARE

Watch that ray, fellows, when you are taking it off your spear!!

The excruciating pain from a Sting Ray is something you will never want to experience. Poison glands are definitely present. There is no specific treatment for the puncture wound other than soaking in epsom salts water or possibly applying iodine, alcohol or potassium permanganate to help destroy the venom. Bacterial infection is also apt to occur from a puncture wound of this type. Better be safe than sorry when it comes to the Sting Ray.

ABALONE CHOWDER

- $\frac{1}{2}$ pound ground abalone
- $\frac{1}{4}$ pound diced salt pork
- 2 medium onions, sliced
- 3 cups pared, cubed potatoes
- $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoons salt
- $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon pepper
- 2 cups boiling water
- 1 quart scalded milk
- 2 tablespoons butter or salad oil
- 1 teaspoon flour

Dice pork and brown, add onions stirring often until tender. Then add the ground Abalone, and boiling water. Simmer, cover, until potatoes are tender. Then add the milk and butter. Just before serving add $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of water brought to boil and thickened with 1 tablespoon of butter and 1 teaspoon flour blended together.



Spearfishermen Enjoy November Trip to La Paz

BY RONALD B. DRUMMOND

Photography courtesy of Doctor Nelson E. Mathison



When flocks of ducks are winging their way southward over the chilly winter waters of Southern California beaches, take a tip from Mother Nature, boys, and head for La Paz, near the southern tip of Lower California, Mexico. Only four hours by plane from Tijuana will take you to a complete change of climate and scenery — both above and below water. If you have never experienced skin diving in the tropics, La Paz offers the nearest and most inexpensive trip where you will find consistently clear water and a superb abundance and variety of tropical fish.

Our party consisted of "Doc" Nelson Mathison, Long Beach; Mel Fisher, Torrance; Chuck Peterson, Inglewood; Ted Warren, Redondo; Paul Hoss, Compton; Eugene Hobart, Hollywood; Jack Waite and his bride Charlie, Compton; and Ron Drummond, Capistrano Beach. For anyone interested in making the trip, "Doc" will be glad to furnish further information.

Just being in the town of La Paz itself with its balmy climate, shady palm fringed water front and old Spanish atmosphere is worth the trip, but for skin divers who are enthusiastic about exploring the innumerable coves and rocky points and long white sandy beaches — it is really "out of this world".

Since most skin divers are more skillful in spearing fish than amassing large fortunes, we had better say a few words regarding expenses. The round trip by air from Tijuana is \$70.00. Other small fees are: \$3.00 to enter Mexico (don't hand the Mexican immigration officer a \$5.00 bill or he will try to keep the change to buy beer); 50 cents a day to park your car at the airport; \$1.17 Mexican fishing license; and tips. We stayed at La Perla Hotel Annex which is not swanky, but plenty good enough for a bunch of fellows who want to strew the halls with diving equipment and store all sorts of marine specimens in the patio. We had the whole annex to ourselves and got our meals at the hotel itself about 100 yards along the waterfront. The cost for both room and meals was \$23.00 a week. The food is good, and you get all you want — which is an item of considerable importance for young fellows spending most of the day in the water.

About the only other expense is transportation to the various good diving beaches, for although the waterfront in town is very picturesque, we were advised not to swim there because of sewage. You can either hire a taxi or sports fishing boat. The more fellows there are in the party to share the ex-

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Here's the gang and equipment destroying fish — writer Ron Drumm with camera.

penses the better. You can hire a taxi to nearby beaches for about \$1.50 (U.S.). An elegant sports fishing cruiser can be hired for from \$30.00 to \$50.00 according to how far you go. This is ideal for you can visit several beaches and your equipment is always handy on board.

One of our most enjoyable trips was to La Suprise, a beautiful beach on the other side of several mountain ridges, where we found the only houses were two little shacks of woven palm fronds, built by a Senor Juan Vivas for weekend vacations. To reach this beach we hired a truck for \$30.00 and piled all our equipment in it, with an inflated five man rubber raft on top of the other equipment, to ease the jolts of the rocky mountain road.

Although our chief interest was spear fishing, it was fascinating to drive through the town and realize that the old patched adobe buildings and walls and crumbling concrete or brick squares around the shade trees, which were imported from India, were all part of a mellowing which had been going on since long before our own first California mission was founded. The better homes near the center of town had luxuriant growths of tropical trees and

vines in their patios, but the homes gradually became more shabby as we neared the outskirts of town until eventually we were passing the typical little poorly white-washed shacks, made of rough vertical boards and thatched roofs, which seemed to well fit the bleak barren cactus strewn environment of the Baja California countryside.

Our Mexican truck driver was a real front seat athlete. He drove at all times as fast as the narrow tracks through the mountains would allow, and kept us constantly ducking as the sides of the truck trimmed off the overhanging branches. It wasn't until we got up into the hills that we noticed that the seven inches of rain this year, instead of the normal three inches, had caused a layer of green grass over all the earth, and the high jagged mountain peaks gave an impression of Tahiti instead of arid Baja California. We crossed one canyon where many indigenous palm trees grew in the dry white sandy river bed, and we were surprised to see one little water hole alongside the road.

Anticipation ran high as we finally approached the white sandy beach and saw that the water was quite smooth and exceptionally clear. The sun was hot and there was no wind. By the time

we had carried all our gear down a rugged little gully from the truck to the edge of the beach we could hardly wait to get into the water, which was a bright emerald green close to the shore. Just as soon as each man was ready, he took off, trailing his loaded yellow one man life raft behind him. Soon from shore we saw a long line of yellow dots leading far out to the deep water where the big fish were.

The water was pleasantly warm. We could stay in all day and never feel the least bit chilled. After putting on a mask and gliding over the first few feet of white sand, we saw that the bottom was covered with a lush carpet of rich green sea plants. On close observation, each small frond was shaped like a little green feather. At first no fish were noticeable, but on looking up we saw, curiously circling us, several little needle-nose fish about six inches long. Also, at times, one or two long thin fish very similar to a pipefish swam around, curiously watching us. Later we found that they varied from about a foot to four feet in length. Their tails extended very gradually to a needle sharp point. The water became deeper until at about eight feet we passed over the green sea growth and found the bottom solid rock with numerous fissures, holes and undercut ledges. This offered ideal hiding places for many types of fish. One of the commonest was the little black and yellow vertically striped sergeant major which swam in various sized schools wherever we went.

We saw numerous porcupine fish which usually were browsing here and there in pairs around the rocks. When lightly tapped on the back of the head they immediately start to puff themselves up until they are perfect spheres and tight as a drum, with spikes sticking out in every direction. They were of all sizes, from only a couple of inches to about a foot and a half. A swimmer with fins can go about as fast as a porcupine fish and watch its comic little stubby tail wagging like mad.

One small variety of parrot fish was quite common. Each one had its particular shallow hole from which it never ventured more than a few feet, and when frightened would dart to this hiding place and enter head first, often leaving its tail in plain sight where it could be easily grasped by a swimmer. Another larger type of parrot fish had a most spectacular bulge on its forehead and was a masterpiece of brilliant colors. Paul speared one of the bigger ones and it weighed twenty-four pounds.

If one of the long spined dark purple sea-urchins was broken, or a rock scallop pried apart, there would suddenly appear from nowhere dozens of little

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horizontally striped black and yellow and lavender fish to gobble up the exposed meat.

Little "bluies", gorgeous electric blue fish about one to four inches long, were seen in ones and twos here and there amongst the rocks.

The deeper the water, the more holes and undercut ledges and caves appeared, and these made ideal hideouts for larger fish. There were less of the small type angel fish with the blue trimmings and bright white vertical stripe down its middle, and more of the common type about eighteen inches long. Almost every cave harbored several of the larger varieties of local fish of sizes from about ten to thirty pounds. These included: small grouper, pargo, cabrilla, golden cabrilla, rattlesnake grouper, etc. Occasionally we saw open water fish such as pompano and sierra mackerel.

When we were in water about thirty feet deep we swam over an undercut ledge with holes about three feet in diameter in the top of the ledge. It looked like we were getting into a good jewfish area so I dove down with my camera, just to get familiar with it, and frightened a jewfish of about one hundred pounds from one hole to another where we looked down and saw it motionless, apparently thinking it was well hidden, although we could see most of its back through the hole in the rocky ledge above it. Doc prepared to dive for it with a CO2 gun, but it darted away in a hurry.

Just then Jack came by on his way to shore with an eighty-seven pound spotted eagle ray he had just speared. It was still very much alive and had four stingers in its tail, each about four inches long.

Jack had just left when we spotted a hawksbill turtle on the bottom between some rocks, and tried to catch it by hand, but approached it too quickly and frightened it away.

While Doc and I were interested in the turtle, Chuck, about one hundred and fifty yards farther out, spotted a huge jewfish. He immediately dove and shot it with his gas gun, but the spear simply bounced off. Mel took movies of Chuck spearing it, and later made a second dive with his camera, but could not see the jewfish because of a dense school of striped perch. He swam down into this school and they separated and again he saw the big jewfish. It must have been a tempting sight, for he put his camera in his raft and came back with his gas gun fitted with a detonating head. The gun worked all right but the detonating head didn't go off. The spear held, however, and the fish darted through two caves thirty feet away.



Jack Waite and his eighty-seven pound Spotted Eagle Ray.

Mel dove again and shot the fish in the side so they now had two spears in the fish, but in a few minutes the second spear pulled out.

The fellows had just about fifty feet of line on their guns, so they could tell that the water was just over fifty feet deep. The top of each cave was almost forty-five feet down. These caves that the fish tried to hide in were about fifteen feet deep horizontally, so it was too dark to try to photograph the fish, and also difficult to get a good shot with a spear gun.

Ted went down twice but didn't shoot. On his third try the detonating head was on safety and his spear bounced off. Then Chuck dove twice, but his spear was out of gas, and twice the spear bounced.

Suddenly the fish ran back the way it came, and when it was in open water they tried to pull it up, but the line was hooked on a rock. Mel went down and unhooked the line, and before he could come to the surface for air, the fish went in another cave. Chuck then dove down to look the situation over and found that two strands of the three strand fifteen hundred pound test nylon line were broken. Mel repaired another gas gun and went down again and the gun was empty. Ted dove with an arbalette (French rubber gun) and it bounced off. Then they put a detonating head on an arbalette, but apparently

the .32 caliber blank shells had become damp, and it didn't go off.

We all knew that these big jewfish had awfully tough hides, but this fish seemed to have either a lot of luck or a charmed life. Chuck dove with another detonating head and arbalette, using an aqua-lung. He took careful aim at the fish's gills, but it must have hit a tough part of the fish's gill-plates, for it bounced. Using the aqua-lung, Chuck went down to pull the fish out of the cave, and the third strand of the nylon rope parted, so the fish was free.

For the next forty-five minutes there were still more attempts, for the fish was hiding in the end of a cave, with its head hidden and its body exposed broadside to the divers. Of course in between dives there was much discussion as to the size of the fish, and its weight was guessed all the way from one hundred and fifty to five hundred pounds. Doc dove down for one look and then went off out into deeper water to get a larger fish for himself.

Finally Chuck went down with the aqua-lung and clear into the end of the cave. With his face right beside the fish he picked up the broken line and tied it together again. He pulled the fish out but it went right in again. Paul then came over with his CO2 cartridge gun, and Chuck took it down, but it bounced. At last Ted managed to stick a regular head into the fishes side, and

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Chuck, using the aqua-lung, pulled on both lines and pulled the fish out of the cave into open water.

The line that had been tied together pulled out, but Chuck managed to keep the fish out in the open and Jack shot it with his cartridge gun and a detonating head. The spear hit a glancing blow on the fish's head and didn't penetrate, but it pushed back the trigger that sets off the detonating head, which exploded, and the concussion stunned the fish as it was dashing back and forth while Chuck was pulling with all his two hundred twenty pounds on a taut line. All this terrific action stopped suddenly when the detonating head went off, and at last the fish floated to the surface — belly up.

After a long hard tow to shore, we made a tripod of large yucca stalks and hoisted the fish for weighing and photographing. Its weight was just two hundred twenty pounds — the same as Chuck's.

That evening we all sat around the camp fire on the beach and had delicious fish for dinner, while a beautiful sunset faded and the full moon rose over the calm sea. We had one Mexican visitor who had his own little ranch several miles away. He really hit his stride after a hearty portion of fish and tequila and regaled us with several Mexican songs.

It was also interesting to hear some of each fellows own diving experiences. Paul had caught a nice hawksbill turtle by hand. He also shot at a manta-ray, but the spear glanced off its head and fell down between the two arms on each side of its mouth. When the manta-ray took off, the spear caught and Paul was pulled so fast through the water that he was glad it came loose.

Ted had brought in a whole raft load of all sorts of interesting and unusual marine specimens which he had found in the water around one of the small islands.

Doc, who speared the largest fish on the previous trip to La Paz had some poor luck. Three days before at this same beach he got his spear into one weighing somewhere between two and three hundred pounds, but it got away after setting his raft on end and pulling it out to sea. Ten minutes later he got one about one hundred eighty pounds, but the spear pulled out. Later Doc and Mel both dove on one together, which they estimated at five hundred pounds, but it took off at full speed and they didn't get in a single shot.

That same day Paul speared a man-eating type shark about twelve feet in length and Mel got movies of it rolling until it broke the line. The water was



Misc. shots at La Paz — see story.

about seventy-five feet deep, and they couldn't see the bottom from the surface. Mel followed another shark down and saw about a dozen other big sharks lying quietly on the bottom, so he decided discretion was the better part of valor, and swam away from the area.

Soon a school of between fifty and one hundred eight foot bottle-nosed porpoises (dolphins, to be correct) swam by him at full speed. He ducked under with his camera and got movies of them coming straight at him, and said it gave him quite a scare, but it was reassuring to know that the big sharks were probably no longer nearby, since they are believed to keep away from porpoises.

The next time Chuck sits around a campfire to swap true spear fishing stories he'll have one that is hard to beat, for three days later he experienced one of the biggest thrills of the whole trip. He speared a one hundred twenty-one pound jewfish which turned on him and attacked him. It took his whole knee in its mouth and left a nasty circle of bleeding tooth-marks. Fortunately it didn't hold on or it could easily have held him under and drowned him. When it made another rush right at his face I thought it was going to take his whole head in its huge mouth. Chuck's spear gun was not loaded, so he pushed frantically on the edge of its big thick lips with his left hand and drove his hunting knife upward into its throat, lifting the fish and ducking his own head at the same time. It worked, and the big fish slithered on over his head.

While all this was going on I was trying to maneuver my under-water camera to within exactly ten feet. Shutter bugs will appreciate that this was really photography under extreme difficulties. The fish would come toward me and then turn and head back toward Chuck. Perhaps the water-box in front of me frightened it — or perhaps it just had a particular grudge against Chuck, for, after all, his spear was still buried in its side. I was shooting 4x5 Ektachrome with an F/2.5 Aero Ektar lens wide open, and my depth of field was ten and one half inches! That picture was taken in one awful hurry while Chuck and the fish were in the act of sparring face to face — and am I anxious to see how that one turned out!

We had originally planned to go diving with waterproof flashlights after that fish dinner at La Supriza, but after sitting around the fire we were all just too tired and sleepy, so we laid our bedding out in a long row on the white sand in the full moonlight, and in no time we were all dead to the world.

The End



BILL HAZEN, President of the Sea-Downers Underwater Hunting Club, has in hand a 35 pound "Ray" and at feet, a 9 pound Bass speared at Palos Verdes. If Bill had a hot on, you'd see a feather denoting him one of the Coast's most enthusiastic underwater-hunters. The boys work in pairs on these Sting Rays as a safety note. Bill speared this one, then his companion moved up, grabbed the tail and with knife in hand, "debarbed" the Ray; they tied him to their float and moved out for the next one.

SEA-DOWNERS

By Bill Hazen

The Sea-Downers Underwater Hunting Club waxes warm in welcome to this publication — "The Skin Diver". We speak with ensured enthusiasm for the future of this voice of the underwater-hunter.

A few words having been sought from us on the "Sea-Downers", we might say we look back on two years of building a club of estimable comradeship and praiseworthy purpose among its now half a hundred members. Among its numerous aims, there stands out one which bears iteration and reiteration among all clubs and all underwater-hunters — this is Safety. In this diving for fish, lobster and abalone sport, danger must not be overplayed nor underplayed. Our sport is a very healthy one, and it's up to us to keep it so. In brief, we must perennially promote "pair-diving". Concentrate on your game, of course; but first, concentrate on the mutual safety of yourself and your companion-diver. And with him doing likewise, you can continue having safe enjoyment of one of the most magnetizing and salutary sports in the world.

DOLPHINS vs. SEA-DOWNERS

Palos Verdes' Flat Rock was the setting for a two hour meet on November 25, 1951, between the Dolphins of Compton and the Sea-Downers of West Los Angeles.

Sunshine and clear cold water must have really brought the fish out with a total catch of 217 pounds of fish for the two clubs. The normal species of fish prevailed. Sheepshead, Cabezone, Opal Eye Perch, Buttermouth Perch, Calico Bass and Sculpin.

The Downers' Pat O'Malley had the largest three fish of the day with a 11 pound Cabezone, 12 1/2 pound Sheepshead, and 10 pound Calico Bass.

The Sea-Downers led the first hour with 68 3/4 pounds to the Dolphins 44 1/2 pounds, but the Dolphins really picked up the cripples the next trip out to come out winners with 120 pounds to the Downers 97 pounds.

A trophy was presented to the winning Dolphin team. Good sportsmanship prevailed between the two 5 man teams and other members. More meets of this type are recommended to create more interest among the club members and to prepare the teams for the National Meet at Laguna Beach.



PAUL HOSS and 18 1/2 pound Sheepshead he speared near Flat Rock in Palos Verdes during the last winter by evidence of the "man from Mars" outfit. Paul is President of the Dolphins Skin Diving Club of Compton and was a member of the Dolphin's team in both the '50 and '51 National Underwater Spearfishing Championships at Laguna. Paul is also pictured on Page 8 as a member of the spearfishing adventurers at La Paz, Baja California.

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LA PAZ — *The Spearfishermen's Heaven . . .*

By Dorothy Davies

On October 19th, 1951, a select group (select meaning: ones who had the dough) composed of Surf Raiders and Neptunes, left for La Paz.

The weather is perfect for skin divers, hot days and warm balmy nights, but never the less, take a jacket. The Mexican Airlines are not as up to date as ours, and it gets somewhat drafty. In fact, darn cold after the plane gains altitude. We have proof of that by ten cases of sniffles acquired coming back.

The trip was very successful in the amount of fish brought in, but not the size. The largest fish was near 40 pounds. The main difficulty we came up against was the lack of heavy equipment. Large Grooper were fairly abundant, averaging between 100-500 pounds, but the gear we had could hardly penetrate, much less, hold them. The first three days left our gear in critical condition. Anyone planning a trip down that way, take all the heavy gear you can get your hands on, you'll need it.

The water was somewhat comparable (?) with our local waters. Waves were one foot high, water temperature 81-83, visibility 60 feet. Unfortunately, we hit one of the worst months. According to reports, the best months are June, July and August. At that time, the air temperature is near 100, the water about 85 and the visibility over 100 feet.

Shark situation has been fairly cleared up, due to the commercial fishing for livers. Phil Nourse, of the Neptunes and Surf Raiders, did acquire a pet of about 15 feet, which followed him about, playing 'hide and seek', and James Dahl, of the Surf Raiders, had a 10 footer cruising behind him for a while. It didn't worry him, he knew it was just curious (he said, as he swam madly for shore).

The hotel in La Paz is exceptionally clean and the food is terrific. Beef steaks and eggs for breakfast, who could want better? The cost for the hotel is \$3.50 per day including meals.

Incidentally, in the hotel cantina they have a very fine triple Tequila Collins about 50¢, American.

La Paz, we'll be back again in July!

Say, have you ever tried night diving? No? well some calm eve get the gang together and with waterproof flashlights invade the inky waters that a moonless night will beautify. Yes the darker the better. As your diving pals pass under you they seem to be on fire

SANTA ANITA NEPTUNES

By Al Tillman

Despite the winter months approaching and difficulty during that period of promoting skin diving, our club has had many additions to the group. The additions are not exactly members; they're spear guns. Five of our members in the past month decided they couldn't wait until Christmas and went to work convincing their wives that "the guns would pay for themselves." The moral of this story is one for spearfishermen: don't ever shoot a spear gun or you'll never be satisfied with less.

Ironically, most of the new guns haven't been fired since "bug" season is in full swing and promises rich rewards. The last two club trips were devoted especially to lobster. An October trip to Dana Point yielded a club limit of large Abs and a dozen or so minimum size bugs. The big ones seem to be out in deeper water, possibly awaiting the hardening of their shells. At any rate, the fellows all desire a return trip to Dana some fair weather day before the season closes.

Four of the Santa Anitas hit Palos Verdes at a choice spot and did very well with several five-pound lobster. The big catch was a fourteen pounder. Dick Hall, star of our diving team, is a devotee of Flat Rock and it's a rare occasion when he can be led elsewhere, however, on this trip he stopped bickering with "Professor" Jess Ranker long enough to prove himself a good bug man as well as a big fish operator.

Jess Ranker and myself are collectors and we don't care what we spear or pick up. There's not always meat on the family table but Jess has an outstanding shell collection and last time I came across a dandy metal tackle box. Don Tillman helps balance the divergent types in our group and keeps the spirit of competition burning. Don is planning a trip to Punta Banda, Baja, California, very shortly and so far Kenny and Bruce Graves have made definite plans to accompany him. They tell me that they know a cave with a lobster as big as Don in it—Don's 6 foot, 5 inches. I guess I'd better take a tip from the abalone and "close on that one".

as the phosphorous streaks from their bodies. The fish will be motionless and you can closely observe all of the beauties and of course the magnification, for old man lobster looks like "he" might be after you, but of course the reverse is true.

LOS ANGELES NEPTUNES

By Woody Dimel

We of the L.A. Neptunes are happy that someone has finally published a magazine for skin divers. We are most happy to contribute to such a magazine.

Skin diving, or more specifically spearfishing, has recently been recognized as a sport ranking with rod and reel fishing and other water sports. It has been a battle for this recognition from the days of a few years back with only a handful of skin divers to the modern times and thousands now enjoying the sport. Organized skin diving clubs have been largely responsible for this gain.

Through the efforts of organized skin diving clubs it became legal to spear fish under water. The International Underwater Spearfishing Association was set up to record underwater spearfishing records. The maximum size limit on lobsters of sixteen inches was removed. These gains were made by organized clubs.

The Los Angeles Neptunes have been attempting to secure a summer diving season for male lobsters without success so far. I believe that with the concentrated help of all the skin diving clubs we can obtain such a season. We have been a lone voice on the floor of the Southern Council of Conservation Clubs against the many rod and reel clubs. If you do not belong to a club then you should join one now and get in the battle to further the cause of skin diving.

This magazine is another step in the right direction. The L.A. Neptunes salute "The Skin Diver" and we drink a toast to its success.



WOODY DIMEL of the Los Angeles Neptunes with a 39 pound White Sea Bass he speared at Catalina Island. Photo courtesy of Julius Downes



RODERICK WHITE with 40 pound Angel Shark taken with a 5 prong spear off Lighthouse Point in Santa Barbara.

SANTA BARBARA SEALS

By Roderick White

In March, 1950, several local divers, Robert Arnold, Wyman Stackhouse, and Roderick White, got together with the idea that a skin-diving club might prove advantageous to enthusiasts in Santa Barbara. They thought that with the pooled interests of at least 8 or 10 members they could more firmly establish and promote the sport in this area as well as financially afford more and better diving expeditions.

Using these two theories as a basis, they proceeded to draw up a charter which stated the club's purposes, procedures, and requirements—all of which emphasized the sport of skin diving and minimized the social aspect. Then after much discussion and elimination of various underwater creatures which might represent the organization, they decided upon the Seal—hence the origin of our name and ultimately our emblem, which was capably designed by Wyman Stackhouse.

As for our activities since then, most of our time has been taken up with exploring new grounds and, of course, gaining more experience. Although we are graced by having some of the best lobster and abalone waters on the coast, we are at a disadvantage in having a lack of large game fish and exceedingly temperamental water conditions.

In the future, however, there is one bright light which we hope will ultimately lead us into real competition with other larger and better-established clubs in California, and that is the Santa Barbara Islands. It is every skin diver's dream to tangle with that big one, and we think the islands are our best bet to realize that dream.

It is our sincere hope that Seal members Robert Arnold, Robert Yeargin, Chuck Fare, and Tony Barragona, who are currently in the Armed Forces, will return safe and soon to take over where they left off in making our club a success.



AL TILLMAN with fourteen pound bug taken at Palos Verdes in October—snipe AI.

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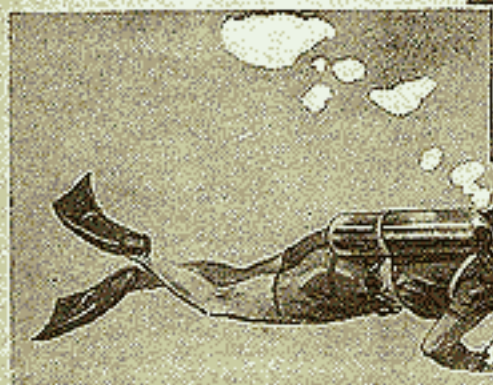
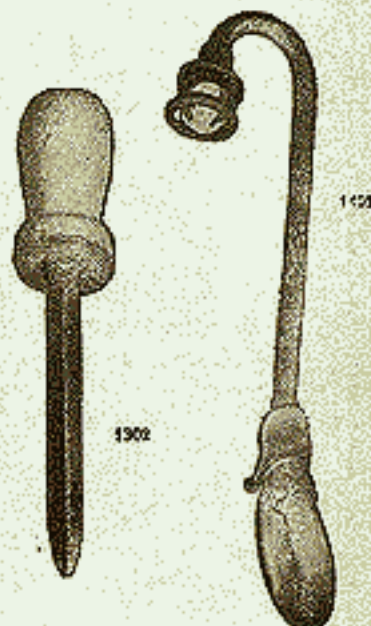
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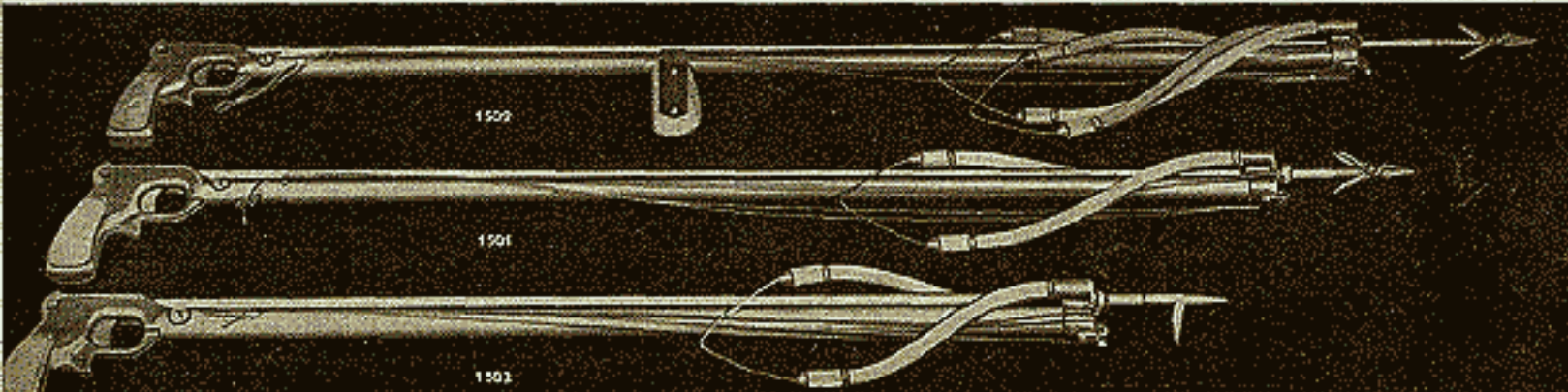
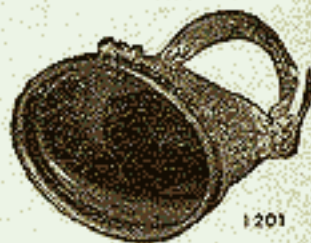


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DON CLARK, Bottom Scratcher and world traveler, with record Jewfish.

The Pearl Divers Of Hikueru

BY DON CLARK

I returned recently from Tahiti and nearby islands spearing fish, taking underwater movies, pearl diving and investigating Tahitian customs and girls (valines are what they call them there). I had a huge time but was unable to spear a fish larger than 26½ pounds while there.

I spent three months on Hikueru, a coral atoll in the Tuamotu Archipelago, that is famous for pearl diving and the hurricane of fifty years ago. As a foreign tourist I was welcome to do all the pearl diving I wished as long as I confined it to obtaining souvenir oysters for my own use.

The divers there use a pair of metal diving goggles and no swim fins, also a lead weight to carry them down for a stay of about two minutes; then they

climb the basket line to the surface.

The eight mile oval atoll is split into three sections, one of which is opened four months, then the atoll is closed for a year to allow a new growth of oysters. First they start diving for the pearl shell in two feet of water. Before the first week is out most of it is picked off to 30 to 40 feet deep. The second week the diving has reached the depth from 60 to 70 feet. The third week I made an 85 foot dive and ripped off one oyster before returning to climb the basket line (I used ten pounds of weight). I had obtained enough shells by this time so I would just dive to 60 feet and watch them working down at 100 feet or more. Before long they would reach their maximum depth, 120 to 130 feet: 20-22 fathoms.

The four months season will harvest some 250 tons of "parau" as they call the pearl shell which brings 40 francs a kilo or about 30 cents a pound. The divers make from \$5 to \$60 a day. The most fall in the \$15 to \$30 a day class. As the season progresses the yield drops off, good pearls are few and far between. The first ten days of diving brought three pearls which netted the divers \$200, \$100 and \$800. Much later on, a perfect 14 carat black egg-shaped pearl was fished up and sent to France with a \$5000 price tag on it.

Of course they use outrigger canoes and one outboard tows six or eight others in return for ten pairs of medium sized shells. The canoes are anchored with a diving weight and they are dropped back on a quarter mile of line. A heavy manila line is used for the basket which is made of a heavy iron ring and woven net below and is hung just off the bottom, high enough to clear the coral. The diver can steer the basket to the sides or swing the canoe by shifting the anchor line out to the outrigger.

They use a mitten glove on one hand, it is homemade of double thickness light canvas. The diving goes on six days a week, if they feel good or no storms appear, but take time off to rest and spear fish any time. The canoes leave the village between seven and eight and they dive until about two, then eat lunch, sleep or spear fish in shallow water until four o'clock.

A 25 year old diver was making \$60 a day but was getting punch drunk because some of the brain cells die from oxygen starvation. Nevertheless there are some grandfathers around still diving at 50 and 60, also a few at 70 years of age. The older ones aren't punch drunk so there must not be any injury if common sense is used.

I also saw how the pearl divers die. Thou was a thirty year old diver, born in the Tomotu. He wouldn't admit to himself that he wasn't good enough to dive twenty fathoms—his heart skipped a few beats and he passed out. I helped work on him for hours and adrenaline was injected but to no avail. Last year two divers died at this atoll but they were youngsters of twenty and twenty-two trying to change over from helpers to divers and were working too deep.

The normal population of Hikueru is about 150 but there were 800 for the diving season and over 200 divers among them. Later I may tell of the other islands, being bitten by a shark, and native dances.

The End

BOTTOM SCRATCHERS

By Don Clark

The Bottom Scratchers Diving Club is the oldest organization of its kind in the country and has eleven members, eight active, two inactive and one dead. The president and mailing address of the club is Jack Prodonovich, 3824 Ampudia St., San Diego 10, California.

Jack has perfected his combination .38 blank impact head and rubber powered spear which enables him to lay off fifteen to twenty feet from a fish of several hundred pounds and shoot his rubber gun which propels a 5/16" stainless shaft, 5' long, carrying the foot long .38 special blank gun. The gun which fires on impact, shoves the dart with nylon line attached to a "Mae West" which floats to the surface. This is how Jack got his 310 pound Jewfish this year. Yours truly's 440 pound Jewfish is still tops.

EDITOR'S NOTE — Don Clark and his Jewfish are pictured on page 13 and you will notice it was far to big to get in the photograph.

Have your club Publicity Chairman mention your name in his next column in **THE SKIN DIVER** — furnish him with a picture of yourself now so he can send it to us. Show your magazine to your friends and let them know that your sport and hobby is not just an exciting oddity. See deadline date on Page Two.



DICK JAPPE and BILL WILSON straining on sixty-five pound Bat Ray — Pacific Palisades.

Shark Kills Aussie Surf Ski Champion

A shark killed Frank Okulich, 21, Australian surf ski champion, at Merewether Beach, Newcastle, on December 6th. His mauled body was washed into shallow water an hour after horrified on lookers saw him dragged under.

MUIRMEN

By Frank Hops

The Muirmen were formed as a group at the end of the war. Three of the members had been diving together since 1938 in the Laguna Beach, California, area. While attending John Muir College, playing water-polo and swimming on the swimming team, the idea of the Muirmen was born. We have always been a small but closely knit group and average about 26 week-ends a year at the beach. We make no claims to any record fish, in fact our only claim is to 13 years of fun and good sportsmanship (plus some wonderful seafood meals and a savings to our food budget at home).

We dive for about everything that moves in the ocean, except Garibaldi's. At the present we are after legal lobster and due to the cooler temperatures we use our gum rubber underwater suits. In 1950 we ended up about sixth in the National Underwater Diving Meet at Laguna, this year we were third.

Attention — The purpose of this magazine is to bring true diving facts and experiences to our readers — so don't have any doubts about your writing ability — send any pictures, humorous stories or yarns to **THE SKIN DIVER** for future publication.

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SOUTHERN CALIF. SKIN DIVERS

By Harry Vetter

One of October's warm sunny days and Carpenteria's calm water brought out thirty active members for the 1951 SCSDC Annual Lobster Tournament. Tournament hours were from 8 A.M. to 4 P.M. Catches from anywhere on the coast were honored if declared and exhibited, within time set, at clubs out-lying headquarters at Carpenteria State Park.

Below average catches were experienced, the largest lobster being only nine pounds, some of the members seemed to think that the waters warm temperature explained the lack of lobster.

Top catches of the day were honored by the presentation of two trophies—first, for the most skillful catch, to Jim Perry of Redondo Beach, Calif., and second, for the largest lobster caught, to Harry Vetter of Lomita, California.

Competition was pretty keen, most members pausing in their diving at noon for a snack of ice-cold watermelon which really hit the spot. The watermelon was timely donated by Lawrence Lopez, the club's official photographer, who since has become the official connection with greengroceries. After this snack everyone again began looking for Bugs.

As usual this annual October outing was a huge success and enjoyed by everyone participating. It was a tired and happy group of skin divers that ended the tournament, some of which cooked dinner or their catches on the gas stoves furnished by the Park before heading for home.



Rubber rafts on Jeep — what Jeep? JACK WAITE is all over this page.

TOP — Two group pics of SCSD on tourney day — some fun.

BOTTOM — HARRY VETTER and winning bag; BUD ABERNATHY and WSB caught at Catalina.