

V226 JANUARY 2020

St. Some Times



**HAPPY NEW
YEAR 2020**

New Years Resolution 19 Years
Running, Sharks, Dragons, Fires,
and WNHTFS.



HAPPY NEW YEAR 2020 #19 AUSTRALIA

This year, I woke up in Port Lincoln , Australia and had nothing to do but sit around and drink beer. While I indulged in pitchers of Coopers XXXX, I composed my December newsletter and simply waited for my next Shark trip.

I stayed in the Grand Tasman Hotel from December 31- January 3 and went nowhere. The exploratory bug just wasn't in me. My hotel room, bar and restaurant overlooking the South Sea was the perfect place to be.

Writing, drinking, editing, chatting up locals!

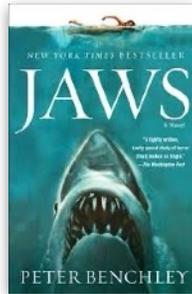


GRAND TASMAN HOTEL

New Years was not eventful for me. It didn't have to be. I wanted a little peace and quiet on land. The excitement was all around the actual New Years.

I just completed my first Great White Expedition and I was waiting for my next. The current trip ,3 days, was fully booked. I later found out they didn't see anything!

The second day on board my last trip, I decided to repeat the trip, change my flights, and hole up in the Grand Tas for a few days in between. So, for the 18th straight New Years, I have woken in a new country.



READ, WRITE, RELAX

I am so easy to please. The hotel staff quickly realized I wasn't going anywhere. I didn't even walk around the block. Why should I? The hotel has a bar, restaurant, and outdoor tables.

The top picture on this page is a shot I took from my outdoor table. I included it because the waterskier just dumped it. To paint the scene a little more clearly, I was in the middle of reading JAWS, the original book written by Peter Benchley.

Remember, I just returned from my first Shark expedition. The book IS entertaining, but now I see all the holes in it. Whites don't go after people!



I.N.H.T.F.S

"I'm Not Here To F**k Spiders" Pardon the language mom, it's just a popular Australian phrase. It quickly became my favorite phrase. "Greg, do you want to go in the cage again?" INHTFS was always my reply.

One of the local old guys, an aborigine, sat down at the table on December 30 to partake of our group's pitchers of beer. He entertained stories of huge spiders and living in the bush. Martin was his name. Drinking our beer was his game. And he did. Martin called me the "old guy". Once he asked me "old man, why the f**K would you want to dive with the white pointers?" Guess what I replied.

EVERY NEW YEARS WAKE IN A NEW COUNTRY AS OF 2002

2019 Philippines

Diving aboard the Infinity Live-a-Board around the atolls and islands of the Philippines. Apo Island, the sardine run, and the frog fish on the last dive.

2018 Sri Lanka

Diving in the North and a local Christmas afternoon with Captain Danu and his family. NY was spent on Safari with Kristin and Madu's family in Tisa.

2017 Saudi Arabia

Xmas on the Maldives with Matt, Pregnant Stacy's broken ankle, and the kids. Headed back to the Kingdom to work Gray Days for New Years.

2016 Switzerland

Germany Xmas with the Judds, then Visiting Philipp and Tini in Stuttgart, then NYs back in Lugano.

2015 Canada

USA for Mom and Dad's 50th Anniversary. Joe's brilliant idea to Ski in Canada for New Years.

2014 France

Xmas with Uta in Berlin. Followed by NYs with snoring/biking Carol in Nice, France.

2013 Trinidad

Xmas in the States. Back home with family. Woke up in Trinidad on the way back to Venezuela.

2012 Suriname

Whirlwind tour with Scott, Tara, and 4month old Elise across From the Eastern tip of Venezuela to Trinidad to Guyana to Suriname and back to Vene.

2011 Venezuela

NY's with local girlfriend Veronica and her family in the Burroughs.

2010 Bonaire, Dutch Antilles

Alone in the ABC's diving off Buddy Dive Resort

2009 Borneo

Diving with Kris and Steve via Scuba Junkies.

2008 Singapore

Alone at Sue and Grant's Apartment.

2007 Kuwait

Worst Holliday ever. Saving time/money for BKK ISS

2006 Koh Tao, Thailand

Escaping Q8, Mario and I experienced Bangkok for Xmas and Diving with Bans for New Years.

2005 Beirut, Lebanon

Skiing with Mooney in Farrayah. Dove in Egypt first.

2004 Nicaragua

All inclusive trip with Ron & Lila pre-marriage.

2003 Caye Caulker, Belize

Utila Xmas with Linda. NY's in Belize diving.

2002 Green Bay

This is when I made my resolution.

2001 Green Bay pre Career



Picture Courtesy of Steve (UK) thanks for sharing, Mate!



FACING GOD

This is an actual photo from a Nikon A300 underwater camera. Taken from the surface shark cage on the back of the Rodney Fox Expedition ship in the Neptune Islands, off the coast of Southern Australia.

When you get this close to a 3.3m Great White shark, some say it is like looking into the face of God. These magnificent creatures have survived five major extinction events, but if we aren't careful, they won't survive mankind.

The Apex predators of the ocean, if you take the fishing industry out of the equation. They are on the verge of extinction.

This was an experience of a lifetime. I have dubbed my week aboard the Rodney Fox as my very own "Shark Week" special.

DIVING AGAIN WITH THE GREAT WHITE SHARKS

After 3 days on land, I headed back out for more. I wanted better pictures of the White Pointers.

I'd like to thank Steve, especially, for sharing his pictures. Steve was using the same camera I was, he just had different chances for taking the pictures. We were in separate cage groups-so different opportunities.



PART OF THE SHORT 3 DAY EXCURSION

What can I say? This group was not as fun as the group before. Not as much energy. But it was still well worth the trip.

When Debbie arrived to pick me up in the Shark Shuttle (arranged at the end of the last excursion) Dani was in the shuttle with two new faces. One new face was Brandon, a sixteen year old volunteer. The other was Martin. Martin turned out to be the excursion leader and trip leader with about six years experience with the RF experiences.

That was a fun little chat as we headed to pick up the other divers at the Marina Motel. Martin mentioned he is a Canadian (mom) and Australian (dad) mix. Dani mentioned the last group, the excursion that I was unable to join because it was fully booked, go skunked. They didn't see any sharks. I kept this under my hat as the new group



THREE CAGE GROUPS + SURFACE TOURISTS

boarded the shark shuttle ready for our excursion. In fact, I kept quiet about most of my previous trip so I wouldn't raise expectations on this one. I had no idea what would be different for this trip

Martin is good at being on stage. He got everyone a little bit riled up, had everyone introduce themselves, and explained the first day as a non-shark excursion and travel day.

I looked around the group and immediately missed Cat and John, the Adelaide couple from my previous trip. Cat is more gregarious and jolly than I am. Cat brought the entire group together. This was going to be a tough group for that. I left the idea of getting everyone to "open up" to Martin. That was his job after all.

For some zombies in the group, the trip would be a rather long affair. Not for me. Shark Week!!



We stopped at Hopkins Island to snorkel with the Sea Lions



The Neptune Islands are a protected Marine Park about 5 hours (by ship) from Port .

Alara, one of our DM's from the Netherlands, took the divers down for the Sea Lion excursion. The other DM had previously informed me that diving with them is not usually as fruitful as snorkeling. According to Katja, the snorkelers get better interaction on the surface.

Alara proved Katja wrong. I was certainly jealous as she got this photo. Alara brought a mirror down with her. The sea lions found this absolutely intriguing and posed for the divers time and again. Still, no one got a great video like I did of a sea lion kissing my camera lens. That video is



Day 1 - We were on board the Rodney Fox (yes the ship is named after Rodney himself) by noon of Day 1. Since we would be traveling more than five hours through the Thorny Passage We gathered together in the mess room for an introduction to the Sea Lion snorkel/dive excursion.

Australian Sea Lions are now endangered, with less than Six Thousand lions left in Southern Australia.

We were allowed to snorkel with them for one hour, enforced by remote camera, but we had to stay away from their beaches so we don't disrupt their mating habitat. One bull is found on each beach with his harem of females and their pups. The pups came out to play, but the bull didn't bother. That's a good thing for us. Bull Australian Sea Lions can weigh up to 200kg, have large front incisors to protect them from sharks, and have a pretty nasty territorial demeanor. Luckily, he was too busy sun tanning on his beach to bother with some loud, funny looking snorkelers.

We had a bit of misfortune when the zodiac outboard motor died. Luckily, the Calypso was there and in

The decision was made to plow ahead and forego the rock wallabies. Martin needed more time to diagnose the problem with the zodiac motor. There was no way to get from the ship onto the wallaby island. It's a good thing I had not mentioned the previous wallaby excursion to anyone or they would have been disappointed. It didn't matter to me. I had made up my mind to stay on board and not go to see the wallabies if they had even gone on the excursion. If you are interested, take a look at my previous newsletter from Christmas. I included pictures of wallabies and sea lions from that excursion.



Picture Courtesy of Steve (UK) thanks for sharing, Mate!

CURSE YOU. BE GONE DEMON TREVALIES! I CANT SEE!

Chum Chummery, Chum Chum, Churuuu

The way the Cage excursions attract sharks is by running a chum line from the back of the ship. It's not really a line, rather a bucket with a running hose. The chum kebab is frozen. It's placed in a rubber bin and as the bin fills up with water, the blood and fish parts melt and overflow into the ocean off the ships stern. This provides an ongoing blood scent trail for sharks. It also provides food for schools of trevalies, leatherbacks, and seagulls.

You Smell Like Chum. I Smell Like Chum.

The surface cage allows four divers at a time to get in the water to see the sharks at the surface. There are four regulators running air at all times. Even if you aren't a diver, you quickly get used to breathing with a "hooka" regulator.

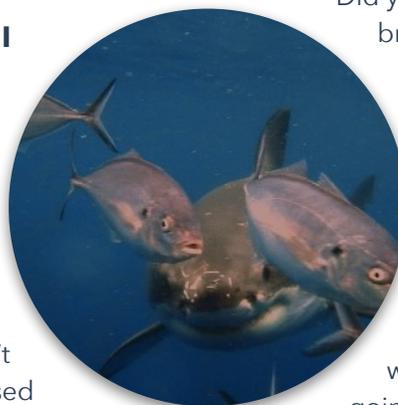
When you enter the surface cage, it takes a bit of getting used to. The aluminum cage is banging on the dive deck of the boat with each wave. Metal noises travel quickly through water molecules. You are weighted down but each wave jostles the humans around in the cage. The bottom of the cage has a foothold bar, but your feet don't always stay connected to it.

Your view is basically blue water everywhere around you, filled with fish. The schools of trevalies, kingfish, and leatherbacks are massive and always circling the cage because the bucket of chum is flowing off the stern of the boat and through the cage.

Dum Dum..... Dum dum!

Cue the music from JAWS. Great Whites are ambush predators. You never know when the face of jaws will appear within all of the fish swimming around your cage. Then, all of a sudden. EEEEEEEEEEEK.

Did you wear a brown wetsuit?
SHARK!



Where to Look Next?

There is no way to predict where a shark is going to appear or when. You know the

tenders are throwing out bait lines with Tuna heads. Every time they toss a bait line, half of the fish surrounding your cage swarm to the bait and fight over tuna scraps.

The four of you work as a team to spot the shark as she/he comes in from all directions. We only had one shark, but your adrenaline is skyrocketing. The most exciting for me was being alone in the cage. Your head is on a swivel. You feel like bait on a hook. You are.



MY OWN VERSION OF SHARK WEEK

The entire expedition is about learning. Within this issue, I'd like to share what I have learned over the past two excursions, about the habitat, conservation, and overall knowledge base of these magnificent creatures. Living on board the Rodney Fox was the experience to learn. Now I pass it on.



THE HYPE, THE FEAR, THE 1974 MOVIE THAT CHANGED IT ALL AND STILL HAUNTS ME (US?) TODAY



WHITES DON'T WANT TO EAT US. WE JUST THINK THEY DO BECAUSE WE DON'T UNDERSTAND THEM

Six shark attacks in one year, globally, and we are still afraid to go in the water. Why? Partly because of JAWS. Mainly because we just don't know how difficult it actually is to be attacked by a Great White. We fear what we don't understand.

This newsletter isn't long enough to go into the details of Rodney Fox's life. You can google him. Briefly, he was attacked back in 1964 while in a spear fishing competition in Australia. 500 stitches and a few years later, he decided to dedicate his life to understanding what almost ended his life.

Great Whites are still relatively unknown as a species. Researchers like Rodney's crews are still trying to track them and find out how, when, and where the mothers give birth. What is known is this: as an apex predator, they have a very long gestation period, give birth to only a few babies, and

abandon them to survive on their own. Exact data is not known yet about their birthing. However, the Fox expeditions have collected a huge database of information based on interactions, photos, and geo tagging of the Whites in the Neptune Islands off the coast of Southern Australia. With over 400 individual sharks tagged, tracked, and even named, the fox expeditions are learning more every time the expeditions go out. Their overall goal is conservation and education.

What I didn't know, before heading out on my trip to Australia, is that April and May are the high times to see these giants. The same super giants (females) return every year to feed on South Australian Sea Lions before they go on deep, long journeys throughout the oceans. December is the low time. Mostly the small 2.5-4m (9-12 ft) males show up.

ST.SOMETIMES V2

CHUM TALK

Chumming for sharks is legal in S.A. (Southern Australia) as long as you have a permit. One boat actually doesn't have permit so they pump music underwater to attract sharks. Does it work? I don't rightly know.

The bait tender saws a huge tuna off at the head and rear fin. The guts go into the chum bin. The middle meat is into three inch thick steaks. Why? There is no hook. The tuna is attached to the rope via twine.

Cut of the head. Gouge the eyes with a screwdriver. Run a twine through the skull. Tie it off. Bait!

If a shark gets it, it gets it. Then, we can't bait for another 15 minutes. Consider it a bait penalty. The government doesn't want baiters to simply feed the sharks to keep them close to a cage. Let the games begin.

The whole chumming and baiting part of the trip was fascinating to watch.

IDENTIFICATION AND TAGGING WHITES

Being on board the RF is amazing. Talk to any of the crew during the trip and you are treated to encyclopedic knowledge from experience. Once we took photos, we would transfer and share videos and pictures with the crew in an effort to identify the sharks. Identification starts from the caudal (tail) fin and works towards the gill plate on either side. Males and females are relatively easy to differentiate. The males have to claspers (male organs) just behind their pectoral fins. Then its all about unique markings.



SHARK ATTACKS?

So what brings a shark towards humans? We tried so hard. Chum, splashing and banging (noise), tons of fish action at the surface, blood trails, and pound after pound of tuna. What brings a shark to even be interested in humans?

Dating back throughout the records of shark attacks, most of the incidents involve free divers that are spear fishing. Sharks are attracted to the trailing fish. Surfers look like surfing seals or sea lions at the surface.

Usually, it is the humans intruding on the hunting areas of sharks. Great Whites mistake us for their usual prey.



SHARK FINS AND LONG LINE FISHING

Humans continue to kill millions and millions of sharks (every species) each year. Some are specifically hunted for their valuable fins, thrown back into the ocean finless to drown, just to satisfy the Chinese shark fin soup industry. The belief that shark fin will help humans with virility is quickly decimating this animal which has no predator except humans.

Long line fishing to put fish on the table is horrendous. Green Peace has been patrolling the world's oceans for centuries now, to no avail. Long line boats drag filament fishing lines for hundreds of miles and hook anything alive. Especially sharks.



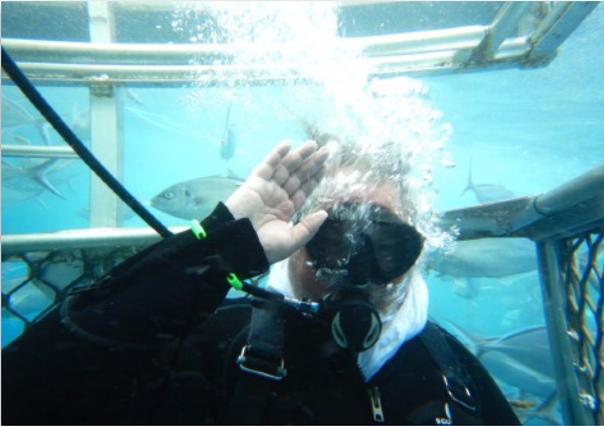
TUNA? NEVER AGAIN AT LEAST FOR ME

I read a lot of books during my trip. Mostly about sharks. I learned more grisly details about the bait we were using, tuna.

The tuna used for cage diving is farmed right in Adelaide and other areas of the world. Caging companies are attempting to be self sustaining industries for tourism and shark research.

However, a lot of the tuna is still coming from long line fishing. The profit margin is so low that commercial and private boats traffic in humans to work on the boats. Why pay wages to fishermen if you can use slaves.

I used to eat occasional tuna. No more. I'm finished. Case closed.



While I was in the surface cage, I didn't know when a Great White or a Bronze Whaler might appear. What direction would it come from next? Did it disappear into the depths? Is it below the cage? Keep your hands in the cage at all times. Whites come in from any direction.

The Great Whites are not necessarily interested in humans. We just so happen to be in the middle of chum city. Sharks think we are part of the blood, guts, and gore. Why wouldn't a shark be interested. We have stepped into harms way!



It doesn't matter how many times I see a Great White, all sorts of inner alarms are going off. Deep in my evolutionary lizard brain, the senses of flight or fight are lighting up. I don't know whether I am actually pressing on the lens buttons or if I just shut my video on or off. It's difficult to keep track of the color settings because the sun comes and goes. Chum suddenly appears and changes the automatic color sensors on the camera if I have automatic switched on. Hence the variety of amateur photos I accomplished to record my experience. Looking at the face of God is the ultimate adrenaline rush!

The minute I re-spot a shark, I have the urge to make sure the others in the cage see it before it's gone. These creatures are graceful, fast, ambush predators. At one moment the shark isn't there. Next moment, 3 or 4 meters of fish is blocking your view of the world. In another half second it is gone!

At one point, I decided the easiest camera trick was to leave it on video the entire time. That way, when the shark startled me gliding past, I could simply point the camera in the right direction. The problem with this method is only when you think the video is running and it isn't. You're too rattled to realize it. Until it's too late.

TWO DIFFERENT CAMERAS. ALL DIFFERENT SETTINGS. PANDEMONIUM!



Can you spot the 3.3 meter Great White in this shot?

After being in the cage a few times, it's easy to get lax on the hard rules. Rule #1 - Keep every part of your body inside the cage at all times. When I had been standing in the cage for an hour, semi-cold water creeping into my wetsuit, and a fifteen foot Great White swam by the cage, I extended my arm to follow the Shark with my camera. Oops. There was absolutely no way to know if another Shark was present, just waiting for the opportunity to get a larger piece of what it might think is part of the chum. Great Whites are known to travel in groups to the Neptunes. I started an inner voiced mantra - inside, inside, inside, inside, inside!



BACK TO SEE MORE LEAFY SEA DRAGONS



I returned to Adelaide and the Intercontinental Hotel for two days before I flew out. I just couldn't pass up another opportunity to see the leafy sea dragons in their natural habitat.

Diving Adelaide came through for me once again. I even got to go with the same dive master, Jake. We drove 50 minutes South and East to Victor Harbor Bluffs. This time, conditions were perfect.



I was prepared this time. The water was 22C. Definitely no wetsuit. Both cameras were thoroughly checked and rechecked. The iPhone was charged 100% and on Airplane mode - a trick I employ to max out battery life while using the camera software. (Although I struggled with the idea of using the iPhone at a low screen brightness. Maybe that saves on battery life, but I wasn't able to see the screen very well to set up shots.

We drove up and there were no waves. I was ready well before Jake was. My

comfort level without a full wetsuit is triple fold. I am in complete control of my dives without a suit. Bring on the dragons.

The sun shone! There was a family with little kids swimming near our entry point. Absolutely no worries getting in. I couldn't believe the change from my first dragon trip. This would be a dream if the leafy sea dragons were even there.

I casually asked Jake if he had ever been skunked on a client trip. Had he ever had a dive without finding dragons. "Well, there was this one Japanese girl. But we found them on her second day of diving!"
Hmm.

**PERFECT CONDITIONS
FOR A DIVE INCLUDED
NO WAVES, LITTLE
SURGE, NO
UNDERCURRENT,
GOOD VISIBILITY, AND
LOTS OF DRAGONS!**



Dragons eat microscopic sea lice.

Usually, clients rely on Jake's expertise in finding the elusive, camouflaged buggers. I spotted the first dragon in the weeds after Jake passed it up. Hah. Both cameras worked. Celebration time!!! Snap Snap Snap.

For the next hour, I filmed over 15 minutes of video, took plenty of pictures at all different settings, and managed the holy grail...the profile shot.

Dragons do swim. If you get too close, and I always did, they will turn from you and show you their ass. It takes some tricky maneuvering, timing, and luck to get their

LASTING IMPRESSIONS OF SOUTHERN AUSTRALIA

I cannot describe just how successful or exciting my overall **"50th birthday trip to myself"** was. It was really THAT great. The only two things that went wrong during the trip were my cameras malfunctioning on the first dragon day and the fact that I couldn't hug a Koala (bear). Ozzies call them simply Koalas.

From the moment I left my apartment to the moment I returned to my apartment (20days) everything went smooth as a baby's butt. Someone must be looking out for me.



GREAT BEERS AND FRIENDLY PEOPLE

Australia is one place I will visit time and time again. It is one place most of us never really think about or know about. It is absolutely huge and we Americans know what we have learned from the Outback Steakhouse. Not much.

Every single Ozzie I met was über nice, open, and welcoming. There is this idea of "No Worries, Mate" that transcends the entire island routine. It's not that they don't care. It's just they don't worry about the small stuff.

Note: There is absolutely NO Fosters beer on the continent. They drink ciders and Coopers Beer or Ales. Australian means beer drinker in the dictionary.



PORK AND BEER YUMMY!

I live in Saudi. That means I have to travel to beer and bacon for me to have a successful trip. The Ozzies believe in the same basics I do. There was always plenty of both to be had. I even had a Two Beer Large Popcorn Combo while I watched the newest Star Wars in the local theatre. Beat that Green Bay!

The pig statue above was one of four presented together in the pedestrian shopping center of Adelaide. There were an extra 2500 tourists shopping on my last day because a Cruise ship had docked here. The bushfires closed down Kangaroo island, the normal stop for the Cruise lines.



"HEY OLD MAN" SAID THE ABORIGINE

Martin is one of the local drunk homeless guys in Port Lincoln. He simply sat down with our group to drink our pitchers of beer with us. He did ask if he could join us and he had his own glass mug. Hah!

Martin called me the "old Man" and told our little group of shark divers stories about snakes and spiders that can kill you out in the bush. Funny guy. Weird experience.

He asked Phil (the 30 yr old from Philadelphia on my first shark excursion) if I was his father. Then we joked about it all night.

Sitting around talking to Martin was quite a blast.



I know how difficult it is to attract a shark. I witnessed first hand how much work it takes to get their interest, enough to get close to a human. I'm still nervous when I am in open water.

We decided to end our trip (second for me) with a fresh viewing of JAWS. I'll never see it the same way again. It's not scary. The movie just brings back all my excursion memories and entices me to read more books about sharks.

I really wish my dad and brothers had been with me.



I was walking on the beach along the South Seas, between the Pacific and the Indian Oceans. Then, what to my bewildering eyes should appear....

Dad's Garage Door Opener. It must have washed up on the beach. What a coincidence. So I took a picture.

Imagine, all the wonderful beaches in this country, and I only went on one beach to look at rock wallabies. Maybe next trip I'll spend more time on the beaches. Perhaps that is where my lost love, my Australian Beauty, my future wife is.

I ate vegemite on toast for 20 breakfasts straight. I love the stuff. My Mac doesn't even know how to spell the word. Fiona first introduced me to vegemite back in 1986 during the great "trade our sandwiches" day during school lunch. I took a bite of her vegemite sammy and she took a bite of my PB&J. We both spit it out and handed each other our own sandwiches back.

Most Americans don't like it. We just don't know enough about it. It comes from beer barrel sediment. Vegemite is meant to scrape lightly on toast or a cracker. Just a bit. A tiny bit goes a long way. I love it.



Yes, on Xmas Eve, I went out on the town. My braids took two hours and \$100AUS ((\$70US) but they lasted for three weeks and many dives. Too bad they didn't have extensions. I will do that for Easter break, maybe.

Australia, I will miss you mate! I'll be back soon. When I come back, you better have a Koala ready for me to hug, a beautiful Australian woman that I mutually fall in love with, and not so many damn bush fires.

Let's all toast the Ozzies and their continent. There is so much more to see and learn, so many more people to meet. Great trip. Thank you Australia.





See you next issue. Find all of my issues of St.SomeTimes at
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