

ARTICLES OF INTEREST REPRINTED FROM OTHER JOURNALS

DIVING IS ADVENTURE:

(except in Queensland)

Bob Halstead

Diving is not amusing nor frivolous. It cannot be conducted casually nor without thought and intelligence. People dive, not for “fun”, but for ADVENTURE. Nothing to be ashamed of here, this is a natural urge, but there are consequences. Pascal noted three hundred years ago that

“ALL THE TROUBLES OF PEOPLE ARE CAUSED BY ONE SINGLE THING, WHICH IS THEIR INABILITY TO STAY QUIETLY IN A ROOM”

He recognised that to seek adventure is a product of being human, but he also recognised that adventurers should anticipate “trouble”. I admit he used the word “men” instead of “people”. I changed it, not to be politically correct, I have nothing but contempt for that trend in intellectual fascism, but because diving is one of the few physical activities where women are equal, and often superior, to men.

As we seek adventure the trouble that should concern us is the “risk” that the adventure entails. Risk increases as soon as you close the front door and head off to the dive site, then increases even more as you get into the water and descend. The risk associated with diving changes as various physical factors change, for example risk increases with depth, if there is a current, if the water is cold and murky and so on. But increased risk does NOT necessarily imply “danger”, a lack of “safety”, and it is this confusion which has led to some quite incredible nonsense being promulgated by Governments and others in the name of improved “safety”.

Risk is the potential for injury to occur.

Risk is calculated by considering the sum effect of the various hazards encountered when diving. The diver should not be included in the risk assessment, because, as you will see, it confuses the determination of “safety” from the individual diver’s point of view. For a particular dive at a particular time the risk is thus the SAME for any diver (or even non-diver!) who attempts the dive. But the “danger” or “safety” depends on WHO is making the particular dive and how well prepared they are to overcome, or neutralise, the risk.

This is very easy to illustrate. If we imagine a dive in shallow, clear, calm, warm conditions devoid of marine

life and any other hazards we would consider this a low risk dive. However the same dive would be deadly dangerous for any “diver” who did not understand the consequences of breath holding on ascent. I am going to clarify what is meant by “safety” and “danger” so you can understand what “Adventure” really is, but first I want to make it clear that adventure is NOT throwing yourself into a situation and seeing if you survive. That is “Russian Roulette”, not adventure. There is also not much point in talking about safety AFTER the event (except to analyse mistakes). If you are about to participate in an adventure you need to be able to PREDICT that the adventure will be safe for you before embarking on it. That is the whole point of this analysis, we want to be able to say, individually, that the dive we are about to make is going to be “safe”.

Before any and every dive, a diver should be able to say:-

“This dive will be safe for me”

This means “it is unlikely (but not impossible) that I will be injured on this dive”.

A dive which is dangerous for me is one where “it is likely (but not inevitable) that I will be injured”.

The reason we cannot predict perfect safety is twofold. First unpredictable events do occur, some people staying “safely” in their quiet rooms have had an aircraft land on their heads, or their homes invaded. Secondly PEOPLE MAKE MISTAKES. Mistakes are another part of being human and no amount of rules or regulation will change this, although many do imagine they can legislate perfect safety (they may safely be called fools).

Now I can define adventure:-

Adventure is the art of safely experiencing increased risk.

Isn’t that beautiful ? We have admitted that risk is necessarily a part of adventure, and now we can see what needs to be done to “improve safety”.

For you to be able to predict that **“This dive will be safe for me”**

1 Consider the hazards and calculate the risk for this particular dive.

2 Assess yourself:-

“Do I have the skills, knowledge and equipment necessary to overcome the risk?”

A safe diver :-

Is one whose skills, knowledge and equipment are sufficient to overcome the risk for the dives attempted.

A dangerous diver:-

Is one whose skills, knowledge and equipment are insufficient to overcome the risk for the dives attempted.

If you understand logic you can see that there is no such thing as a "Safe Dive" just "Safe Divers", and of course no such thing as a "Dangerous Dive" just "Dangerous Divers". You can also see how diving risk should "be managed", we neutralise it with skills, knowledge and the right equipment. We do NOT remove the risk, nor lessen it, although this may be the best approach for commercial divers, or workers in a factory, but they are not seeking adventure! By the way, for sake of brevity I am including fitness and health considerations under "skills".

Diving is not dangerous

A dive may be high risk

A dive may be low risk

The danger depends on who is making the dive

Does the diver have the skills, knowledge and equipment necessary to overcome the risk?

If the diver does:-

The dive is safe for that diver

If the diver does not:-

The dive is dangerous for that diver

This shows us how we can make diving safer. We need to concentrate our efforts on teaching divers to recognise hazards and to be able to assess the risk that the hazards present for the particular dive to be attempted. We also need to teach divers how to realistically assess their own ability to ensure that they recognise when they do have the necessary skills, knowledge and equipment, and when they do not, in which case the dive should not be attempted. Of course we also need to be able to improve the skills and knowledge of divers by better training.

Unfortunately this is not what is happening. We are told that risk must be "controlled" or "managed" but what actually happens is that the risk is being REDUCED and this is lauded as "safe practices". This is not contributing at all to the cause of improving diver safety, it contributes to the cause of ELIMINATING THE ADVENTURE. Please allow me to make this clear.

The mountaineering equivalent would be to instruct mountaineers to climb Mount Snowdon instead of Mount Everest. The motor racing equivalent would be to restrict speeds to 100 kph. The parachuting equivalent would be not to allow any jumps from higher than one metre Have I made the point? YES all these instructions would REDUCE INJURIES but would they make the sports SAFER? The answer is NO because the sport no longer exists. Mountaineering is about climbing mountains not hills, motor racing is about going as fast as you can and parachuting is about jumping from heights where if your parachute fails, you die. The ADVENTURE has disappeared.

Let us go back to Pascal, he was a smart lad. People will seek adventure in their lives. In some the drive is stronger than others, but if attempts are made to frustrate, inhibit or suppress these adventures then watch out for trouble. If adventures such as diving are restricted, then people will turn to other, possibly less socially acceptable, forms of adventure.

Or they will remove themselves from the restrictions and from the opportunity to learn professionally how to be safe divers. Here is the danger created by such organisations as the Queensland Division of Workplace Health and Safety when they start sticking their nose into ADVENTURE. If I wished to start an adventure diving BUSINESS in Queensland and pass on some of the knowledge and skills I have learned, I create a "Workplace", I therefore have to conform to a "Code of Practice", created by a committee. The Code creates a "Duty of Care" which makes me liable to criminal prosecution if someone "in my care" is injured, even if the code was followed. (The recent case involving the owner of a crocodile farm in Queensland whose employee disobeyed instructions and got eaten, demonstrates the fanatic desire of the Division to prosecute, causing the innocent owner unjust expense and stress. The owner eventually won the case.) Inevitably someone "in my care" will injure themselves sooner or later because (a) stuff happens and (b) people make mistakes. The effect of the "Duty of Care" transfers the blame from where it belongs, the adventurer, to me, so now I could be taken to court and subjected to an inquisition by people who know a lot less about diving than I do. Some of them think you have to wear a snorkel all the time. I could lose my house too. Well it seems to me that the odds are too much against me so I will not be starting an adventure diving school in Queensland and those who want to learn more about the Art of Safely Experiencing Increased Risk will have to learn the hard (and dangerous) way.

Having recently dived at a very efficient and idyllic resort on the Big Barrier Reef (The world's largest partly living coral and rubble reef! By the way there were lots of turtles but they all seemed to be afflicted by plastic tag disease probably caused by an outbreak of scientists.) I can

report that indeed the Adventure is disappearing. I was restricted to a maximum depth of 18 m with a limited bottom time, and exactly the same restrictions would apply if I had just passed my first diving certification. This is the really dumb thing about limits, they do not discriminate between divers of various abilities, and, as I have pointed out, 18 m is plenty of depth for an incompetent diver to kill themselves. The Workplace legislation is such a monster that many operators dare not step out of line and the resulting experience they are forced to offer is modest. The operator and guides at the resort, all great people, have my sincere sympathy, no doubt they will soon be able to apply for stress compensation caused by Duty of Care responsibilities unfairly inflicted on them.

So instead of scuba diving I spent a lot of time snorkelling around the island, which was fantastic, however, having read the new Code of Practice for snorkelling I can see that they will have to restrict this adventure soon too, at least they will when they read the Code and realise its implications. To reinforce my point please read the snorkelling Code if you get the chance and note there is no prohibition of non-swimmers, which I cite as evidence that the real safety issues such as skills are NOT the concern of the legislation. It is difficult to reach any other conclusion than that the prime aim of the legislation is not in fact safety, but to find SOMEONE ELSE TO BLAME when something goes wrong.

Now for a bit of humour, grab this. In the SPUMS Journal of September 1995 Mr Rod Punshon, reported to be a member of the Diving Industry Workplace Health and Safety Committee, listed the measures the Pro Dive facility in Cairns, of which he is director, used to achieve their "excellent" safety record up to October 1994 (which, by the way, is nowhere near as good as mine in PNG, and we offer high risk diving). Now I see reported in Dive Log of November 1995 that his Pro Dive Facility was among 20 businesses and individuals who received (Queensland) Workplace Health and Safety Annual Best Practice Awards. The measures taken by Mr Punshon that he attributes to improving safety are listed in the SPUMS Journal as, and I quote (the italics are mine) :-

- 1 Strict adherence to "deepest dive first". This policy is *enforced* by a *mandatory* break of a minimum of 12 hours out of the water for *any deviation from this basic policy*.
- 2 A *limiting* of maximum depth for certified divers, unless *under strict supervision* or training, to 30 m.
- 3 *Limiting* alcohol intake and encouraging more rest. (This would not be popular with SPUMS members! B.H.) We *actively discourage* partying on board during trips.
- 4 We now *calculate and check* all dive profiles and *ensure compliance* with "no decompression" table *limits* on each dive.
- 5 Any accidental entry into decompression is

penalised by a minimum of six hours out of the water, *depending on severity*.

Well this does not sound like fun, and it does not sound like adventure either, nor even as though the people involved might be grown ups. But such insight into human nature! And this is award winning stuff! Question:- If you want people to behave responsibly the way to do this is to treat them like Please send your answers to the Queensland Government.

In the meanwhile, offered in the spirit of "Those aren't rules, THESE are rules", here are some of mine.

HALSTEAD'S GOLDEN RULES OF DIVING

- 1 **Diving is adventure.**
- 2 **Write your will before you become a diver.**
- 3 **Never dive deeper than your IQ (Imperial units and you may add half your age for every 1,000 dives made).**
- 4 **Never dive with psychopaths.**
- 5 **Avoid the surface whenever possible.**
- 6 **Come up slow and stop in shallow water before surfacing.**
- 7 **Do not run out of breathing gas, carry a completely redundant unit.**
- 8 **Remember most "safety" devices can cause injury (particularly BCDs) simplicity is often best.**
9. **Do not dive dangerously. Assess the hazards, calculate the risk, know you have the skills, knowledge and equipment to overcome the risk.**
- 10 **Know yourself, know diving. The more you know, the longer you live.**
- 11 **Freedom means sometimes choosing not to dive.**
- 12 **Take the blame for whatever happens to you.**

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