

SOLO DIVING AND THE RECREATIONAL DIVER

PART 2

In the first installment I attempted to cover some of reasons solo diving is coming of age. I also attempted to define what I would consider solo diving. Now lets try to cover some of the pros and cons to solo diving activities.

Let me start by saying that I have had a lot of interest in the course. There are, of course, two camps on the issue. The first, to be sure, is the group of naysayers. They think we are going to get everyone killed. To this group I can only say open your eyes and watch what is actually going on in the real diving world. There are a lot of untrained solo divers out there. The problem is simply that. Untrained, it is to some degree playing the fool's game. I am not a gambling person. I take few chances. Those who really know me, know the dedication to training I take. To be sure, the types of activities I pursue carry a greater degree of risk. However, through dedication to training, and practice, I can stack the odds in my favor. Any activity I undertake, whether cave, deep, or solo has only been after training, practice and a great deal of preparation.

The second group of people has been the closet solo divers who want the training. The only reservations many have expressed is whether the dive operators will honor their training. This is a valid concern. There will be those who will never accept solo diving as a valid form of diving. After all there are a lot of no nitrox divers, no computer divers, etc. who go on there merry ways expounding the dangers of both.

There are already many operators who embrace this opportunity to allow those so trained to follow this activity in the open. They see legal relief as a potential benefit to what has been going on for some time. They have felt like they have been in a catch 22 position. If they barred everyone caught solo diving they would negatively impact their bottom lines. At the same time if they did a bad pairing they could be held liable for not doing it correctly. Maybe, by allowing solo diving, we can place some personal responsibility back on the individual diver rather than a third party who can't control the situation anyway.

In the cons camp are of course all the agencies except SDI. They site the need for buddies as a gospel truism just as they are still expounding the necessity to have the diver wear the snorkel on the side of the mask. (The snorkel is another topic) They of course site the accident analyses pointing to the number of divers who dive alone as ample proof to the need to maintain the status quo. What they are overlooking is perhaps that their training methods don't allow for the necessary knowledge to be passed on to enable one to be more self sufficient.

It is not all the training agencies' fault to be sure. A lot of blame can go to the diving public itself. To a great degree most divers are out to get the cheapest, fastest training available. They don't realize the risks involved at the onset. I have seen this trend in the market for years. The agencies are thus taking a legal stance more than anything else. When diving began in earnest in the 50's and 60's the equipment could be called crude at best. No BCD's, no SPG's and no octopus were used or available. There was no adequate thermal protection. Certainly it took a great deal of stamina to even undertake the classes. (After they were made available) Diving in its infancy was an endurance sport requiring great physical prowess. There were a lot of emergency out of air ascents and cases where a dive buddy could and did render his regulator to his buddy for a buddy breathing ascent.

Today, no agency requires open water level divers to buddy breath. Things have indeed changed. No one would even think of diving without the BCD, SPG and octopus. But the idea of the buddy has not gone away. In fact, if anything, an argument could be put forth that the buddy is as important today as it was 30 years ago. Unfortunately, it is for the wrong reasons.

Thirty years ago, all the divers could be relied upon to render assistance when needed. The lack of equipment mandated the backup system in the form of the buddy.

Today, with accelerated training and lower physical standards, a situation has developed which I refer to as the dependent buddy. Whereas before, when a buddy was mandatory due the riskiness of diving or lack of certain pieces of equipment, today's diver often relies on his buddy to fill in the gaps in training and experience.

We are drilled in open water class to never dive alone, but are never told why. We go through a couple of cursory exercises and are led to believe that is all that is needed. Believe me, when a diver comes up to you out of air, he/she **will not** wait for you to gain your composure and hand off a regulator.

Then why should or would one solo dive. Well for one thing not all divers choose to follow the path of least resistance. They actually want to take responsibility for their actions. For those few dedicated divers, I propose why not? We have sophisticated equipment available for dives in the recreational range in the form of special BCD's, high performance regulators, back up systems to replace the need for buddy. The only thing we can't carry extra is a brain.

We can however augment that brain with knowledge. That knowledge can be transformed into reflex actions with training and practice. In many circumstances, we can equip a solo diver to be able to dive with less risk in some situations than if they dove with a buddy.

I eluded in part one that diving alone can be very relaxing. I also stated that I prefer to dive with someone. Am I trying to have it both ways? No, not really. Diving is a pleasurable experience, and like most pleasurable experiences I prefer to do them with someone. To be sure, there are real loners out there. If that is their motivation, then more power to them.

Well, what is involved in becoming a solo diver? The requirements are as follows;

- Minimum age of 21
- 100 logged scuba dives
- Signed medical release
- Advanced Diver certification

The minimum age is required due in a large part to a certain maturation of a person of that age as well as some serious legal concerns. The requirement of 100 dives means you will have a basic experience level. Most people with a hundred dives have also found themselves challenged at least once and will have experienced at least one basic reality check. A signed medical release goes a little way in assuring you are in good physical health to begin with and someone with a hundred dives should have attained a minimum of advanced diver. (One would hope)

The training regimen requires 8 hours of classroom and two dives. The two dives require the use and demonstration of some specialized equipment and skills.

In the class we cover basic backup systems, their advantages and uses. We also cover proper venues and circumstances which are or are not appropriate for solo diving. There are many special pieces of equipment which may be nice for a normal scuba diver to have but are necessary for the solo diver.

On the open water dives you will be challenged to demonstrate some basic and advanced self rescue techniques. Though only two dives are required, do not be surprised if you are required to do a third or even fourth dive. You will get it correct or you will not be granted a solo certification.

If you think solo diving is for you or you would like to learn how to survive without depending on the abilities of a complete stranger, then give us a call here at Airheads Scuba. Let our diving professionals have a heart to heart talk on the pros and cons for this or any other type of diving you may have questions about.

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