

# Scuba & H2O

YEARLY SUBSCRIPTION \$20

ADVENTURES MAGAZINE

## 12 BEYOND THE COMFORT ZONE

TRAVEL ON A JOURNEY WITH FAITH ORTINS

## 20 LIDA'S GOT IT COVERED

A COMMUNITY OF DIVERS

## 46 WHALE OF A TALE

THE ADVENTURES OF GENE PETERSON

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## From the Editor

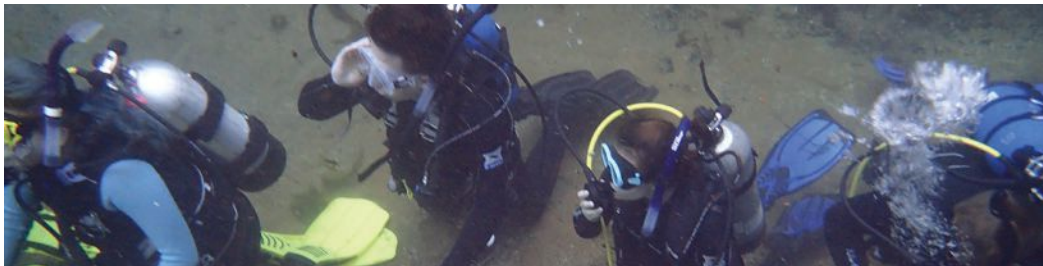


In this month's edition, we highlight the overarching theme of our publication: showcasing the many ways and avenues scuba divers enhance not only their own communities, but neighbors and friends local and abroad. Through collective efforts, scuba divers are representing and protecting delicate ecosystems and their fragile inhabitants, developing products and systems to make a safer experience for man and animal, and are establishing educational opportunities to ensure the next generation of scuba

adventurers and ocean stewards. Ultimately, these efforts are leading to a better overall world for the environment, water-based areas, and watersports industries. It's not always easy – there are often pitfalls and stumbling blocks along the way – but this community takes these challenges in stride, and we are grateful for their tenacity.

Scuba diving is a multi-lateral sport with many paths and branches to take. Over the years, Scuba & H2O Adventures Magazine has brought together a variety of writers of all interests and walks of life who have shared their causes, stories, and expertise with our global audience. You will notice that throughout this edition, our writers have covered a swath of topics both international and in their own backyards, and we greatly appreciate their contributions.

March's edition of Scuba & H2O Adventures Magazine goes out to all of those who have helped shape and connect our publication with diving communities around the world. As these groups continue to expand, our magazine will be there to spread the news in kind.



John Tapley  
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### About the Cover:

Faith Ortins is chillin' in Antarctica. Meet Faith!

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SCUBA & H2O Adventure is published monthly by the Dive News Network Media Group at PO Box 1494, Oak Harbor, WA 98277. The Dive News Network Media Group & ScubaH2O Adventures reserves the right to refuse service to anyone it chooses. © 1997-2019 Scuba H2O Adventures. All rights reserved.

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SOUND  
BITES

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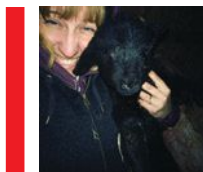
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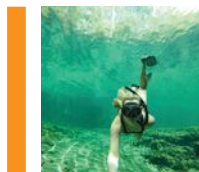
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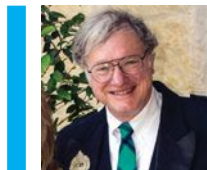


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Caitlyn is Content Writer and Editor for Divers Alert Network in Durham, NC. She is an active PADI and NAUI Instructor, RAID Rebreather Instructor and graduate of the University of Georgia.

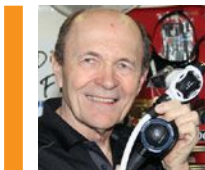


A BEACH IS NOT ONLY A SWEEP OF SAND, BUT SHELLS OF SEA CREATURES, THE SEA GLASS, THE SEAWEED, THE INCONGRUOUS OBJECTS WASHED UP BY THE OCEAN. **HENRY GRUNWALD**



GARY  
LEHMAN

Gary came to diving later than most, and loves to get away when he can – which is not enough! Some of the most memorable experiences ever for Gary have been underwater with his club buddies, turtles and sharks! When not diving or thinking about it, he writes about it!



ALEC PEIRCE

Alec Peirce is recognized as one of the finest scuba diving presenters of his generation. He holds instructor certifications with seven different scuba training agencies plus many honorary awards from the scuba industry including the prestigious "Platinum Pro 5000 Diver".



ELIZABETH  
BABCOCK

Elizabeth Babcock, LCSW has been a certified diver since 2000. She is a psychotherapist and community educator who has written extensively on topics of interest to anyone seeking to maximize their health and overall enjoyment of life, though her primary specialty is the treatment of overeating. She recently published "[Why We Overeat and How to Stop.](#)" (available at Amazon.com).



JAMES  
LAPENTA

I am a recreational and technical SCUBA Instructor whose primary goal is to create divers that are safe, skilled, and competent. I'd rather lose business than certify an unqualified diver. It is my moral and ethical duty to call out unsafe practices, standards, and those who defend or use them.



BONNIE  
MCKENNA

Destined to a life with adventure, Bonnie McKenna took her open water dive in 1955 with no wetsuit or BCD, a J-valve tank, double hose regulator, and fins that weighed a ton. She explored the world, with camera in hand, as an international flight attendant. Now retired, she spends her time working as a photojournalist and conservationist.



JOHN C  
FINE

The author Dr. John Christopher Fine is a marine biologist, Master Scuba Instructor and Instructor Trainer. He is an expert in maritime affairs and has authored 26 published books. His large format coffee table book: *TREASURES OF THE SPANISH MAIN* contains information and photographs of Spanish colonial shipwrecks.



GENE  
PETERSON

An accomplished wreck explorer, historian, speaker, instructor, and business owner, Gene is a man who wears many hats, and who has made significant strides in surfacing the deep history of New Jersey shipwrecks. Gene has over 40 years of experience in these fields, and we look forward to sharing his stories and expertise in future editions.



MICHAEL  
SALVAREZZA

Michael Salvarezza and Christopher Weaver have been diving the waters of the world since 1978. In that time, they have spent thousands of hours underwater and have accumulated a large and varied library of photographic images. They have presented their work in many multi-media slide presentations, and have appeared previously at Beneath the Sea, the Boston Sea Rovers Underwater Clinic, Ohio ScubaFest and Our World Underwater.

Eco-Photo Explorers (EPE) is a New York based organization and was formed in 1994 to help promote interest in protecting the environment through knowledge and awareness through the use of underwater photography.



CHRISTOPHER  
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JEFFREY  
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Jeffrey Gallant is the Editor of the Diving Almanac and a shark researcher. He started diving at age 14 in 1982 and has since led scientific and training expeditions around the world. Among other accomplishments, Gallant was trained as an aquanaut in Romania in 1995 and he dove with Equipe Cousteau in 1999.

# What happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas

# Desert Diving

# in Sin City

MICHAEL SALVAREZZA & CHRISTOPHER P. WEAVER



Well, when you wander down the Las Vegas strip, all of these phrases seem appropriate. Whether it's the incessant call of the casinos, the quickie wedding chapels, the never-ending happy hours, the burlesque shows or the advertising trucks driving by beckoning you to call for some evening companionship, Las Vegas seems to have something for everyone. These days, the seedier side of Vegas is balanced with fine dining, luxury hotels and top-flight entertainment and, in many ways, is an exciting vacation destination.

What you don't often associate with this desert playground is scuba diving...

We were only about 30 minutes outside of Las Vegas but it seemed like an entirely different planet. We were driving through barren but beautiful desert vistas, with colorful rock formations, groups of cactus and low brush, and dramatic mountains in the distance. We had quickly left the glitz of the city behind and we were in the wilderness.

Before long, we found our exit and suddenly we were "off road" on a 3-mile stretch of unmaintained dirt and loose rock. The destination: a dive site known as Kingman Wash on the banks of Lake Mead. Technically, we had crossed the border into Arizona. Nevertheless, we were in the Mojave Desert and ready to don our scuba gear for an underwater exploration.

In 1931, construction of the Hoover Dam began. The idea was to harness the power of the mighty Colorado River to generate electricity and supply water for the region. The reservoir that was created by this



Kingman Wash is a unique dive site in the desert

structure is Lake Mead, named after Elwood Mead, the Bureau of Reclamation commissioner at the time. The lake is approximately 112 miles long, spanning the states of Nevada and Arizona, and has 247 square miles of surface area. At an elevation of about 1,221 feet above sea level, and with a maximum depth of 532 feet, the lake is an impressive body of water in an otherwise dry and inhospitable location. Because of an increase in water demand, and a sustained drought, the lake's level has been dropping and the most visible and dramatic evidence of this is the so-called "bathtub ring" on the rocks near the shoreline.

Kingman Wash is located in a protected cove not too far from the dam itself. With little more than rock, and a few hardy stands of low desert vegetation, there is no shelter here. The desert sun can be brutal so be prepared on hot days. The dry climate is another concern: divers must be diligent in remaining hydrated.

After suiting up, it was time to dive. The 77-degree water was a welcome relief from the heat of the desert and we submerged quickly into a garden of aquatic plants growing near to the shoreline. This jumble of vegetation provides shelter for the local fish population and almost immediately a shimmering school of small baitfish swam by, reminding us of schools of shiners and glassy sweepers on marine coral reefs.

The vegetation only seems to inhabit the immediate shoreline and by the time we had dropped to 20 feet, we were swimming over a muddy, silty bottom punctuated by large rocks and boulders every so often. Here, we would occasionally encounter larger fish, like the Largemouth Bass, the Channel Catfish and even a large Carp. Bluegill Sunfish would also swim by, although most of those seemed to stay by the vegetation in shallower water. As we descended deeper, the visibility remained a steady 10 feet until we reached 60 feet. Here, a billowing cloud of silt reduced visibility to almost zero. It was time to ascend to clearer water.

## The city of Lost Wages





In order to keep the visibility to a manageable level, divers must be careful to avoid kicking up the silt on the bottom. Much of the lake bottom at Kingman wash is muddy silt, so proper buoyancy and fin control is a must.

As we began our return to shore at the end of our first dive, we suddenly encountered a spine-tingling moment...that is, a frightening jolt until we realized what we were looking at and began to laugh.

As we swam towards shore, what emerged out of the edge of visibility was a skeleton! Sitting on a lawn chair! And holding a beer! Suddenly, we looked around and found ourselves in the midst of a garden of skeletons in various humorous poses. One was on a toilet reading the paper. Another was reclining in a lounge chair. In the gloomy water backlit by the desert sun, these figures struck an ominous pose!

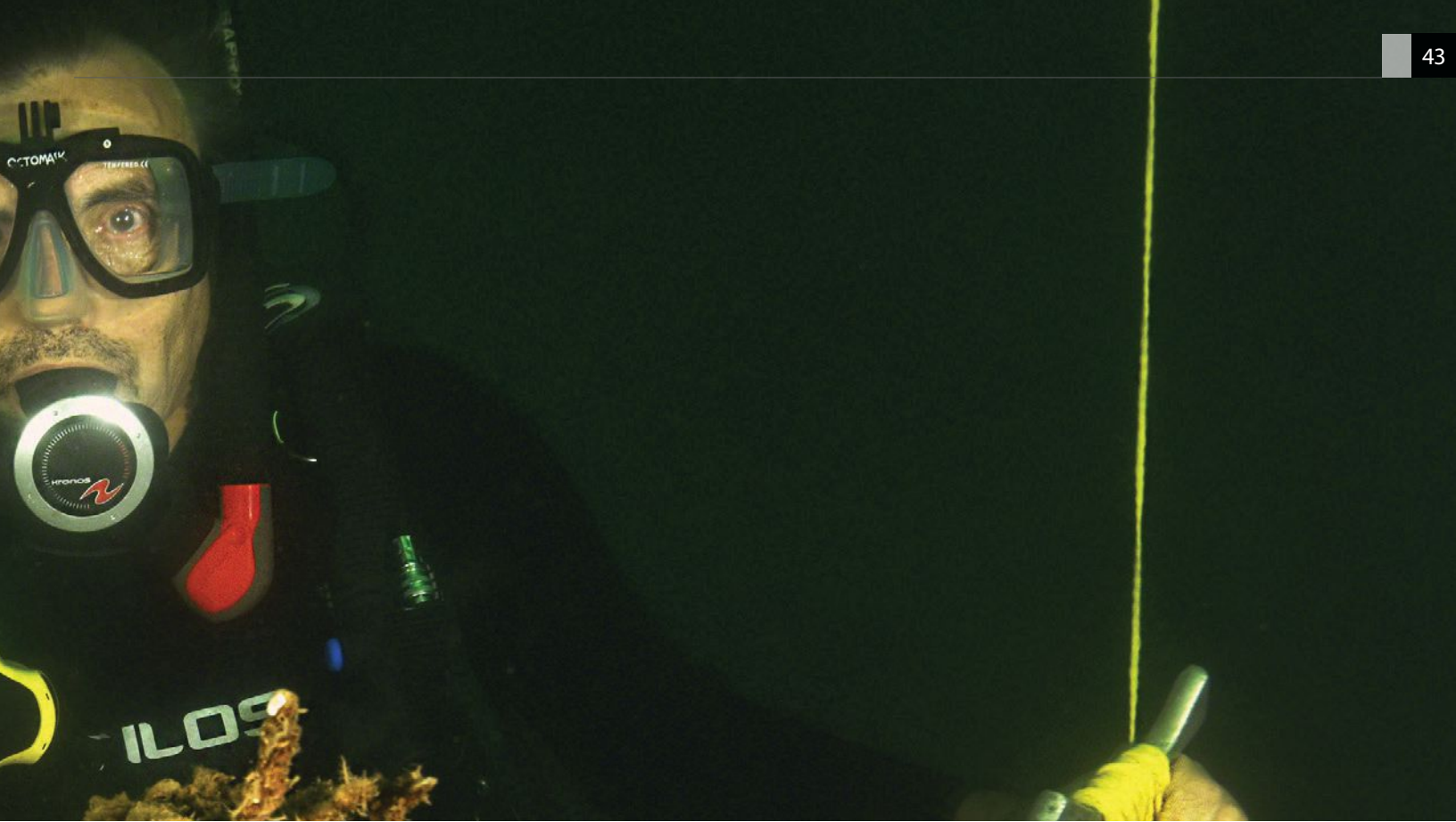
Of course, they are fake skeletons, plastic figures placed on the bottom by some unknown person. For divers, it is quite an entertaining part of a dive in Lake Mead. Indeed, there have been other reports of similar fake skeletons being found in other dive sites on the lake, all deposited by an individual whose identity has not been revealed. Is it an elaborate hoax? Is it the work of an anonymous artist? Is it a Halloween prank? Whatever the reason, these figures make for a colorful story over dinner.

As we emerged from the water, we took a moment to savor the sublime quiet of the location. Looking around at the rocks and gazing out across the lake to the mountains on the other side, we appreciated the unique opportunity to scuba dive in the heart of the desert. Suddenly, on shore, a Road Runner scampered by...we waited for Wily E. Coyote to follow but he didn't! But it was a sign that the desert is alive, even when it appears lifeless and desolate, an ecosystem as vital to the health of the planet as any other. And equally as beautiful.

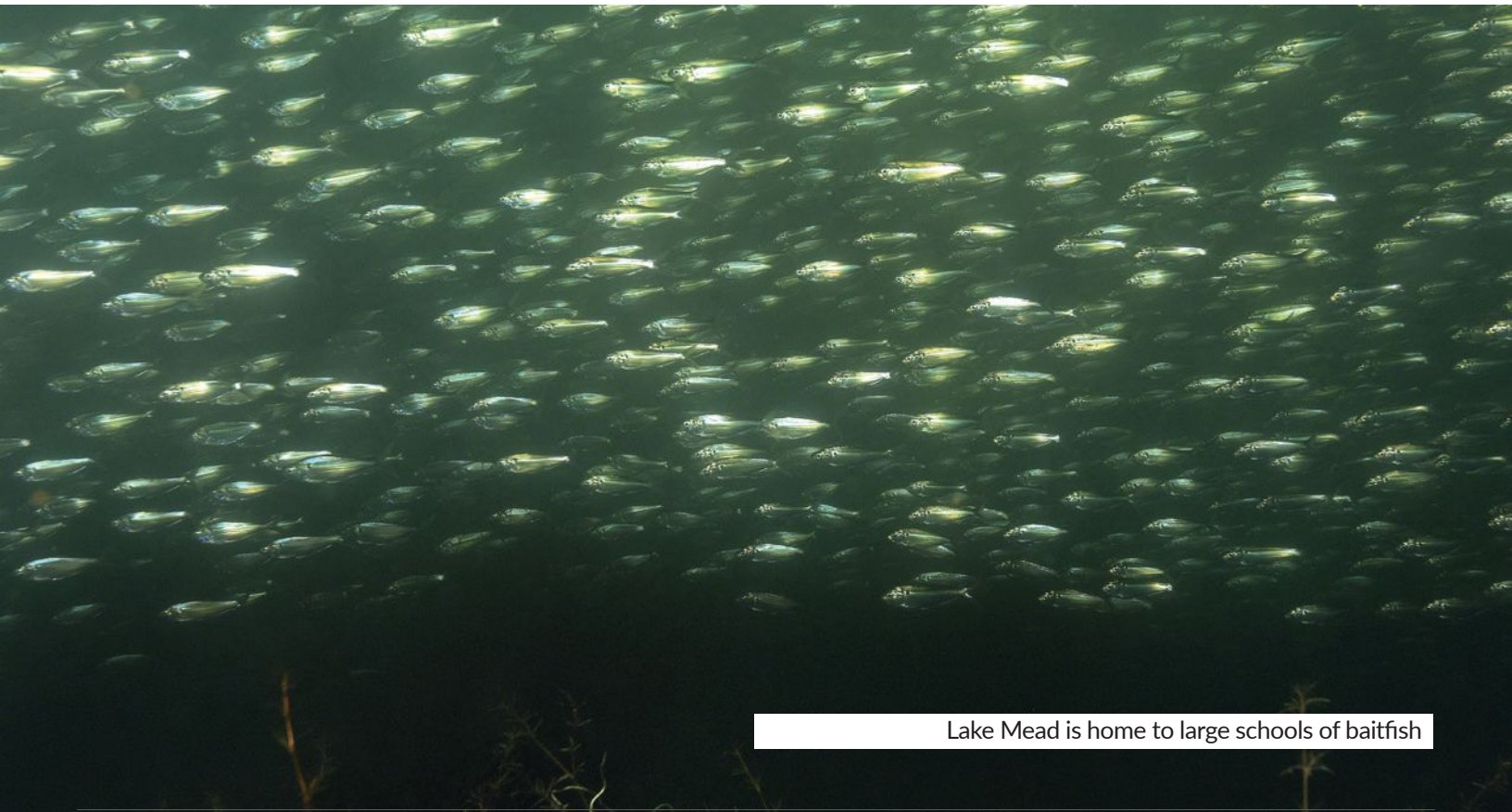
Lake Mead is host to other dives sites nearby. Placer Cove and Boulder Beach are alternate shore diving destinations to Kingman Wash. In addition, there are several sites accessible by boat, including cathedral Cove and the Black Canyon in Boulder Basin. Many divers have heard about a lost B-29 bomber discovered by divers in deep water in 2002. This is a protected site and scuba diving on the B-29 is highly regulated.

Diving Lake Mead is a unique opportunity and one that you should consider next time you are visiting Las Vegas. Martin Davidson of Simply Scuba can provide the gear you need and guide you on your underwater exploration of the desert lake. Imagine, making two dives in the desert and getting back in time to enjoy the lunch buffet at your favorite hotel!

And while you are at it, perhaps you can solve the mystery of the skeletons under the waters of Lake Mead.



Now that's a story you can feel comfortable sharing when you return from Las Vegas.



Lake Mead is home to large schools of baitfish