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March 29 | at 1:30pm

PAUL HUMANN
and the first
**LIVE-
ABOARDS**

PAUL HUMANN AND THE FIRST LIVEABOARDS

The story of liveaboards starts in 1972 with the Cayman Diver, the first dive boat that hosted tourists for more than just diving - an invention of Paul Humann. Until today his concept was refined a lot – but it was in the late 1980s when Bret Gilliam maximized the idea with the largest dive cruise ship ever, the Ocean Spirit.

Humann remembers, “Next thing I knew I was on an airplane to Grand Cayman to hand over a small deposit check. Right after lunch it happened: the first dive live-aboard boat was mine. But the work had just begun. I came home and begged friends, family and, in particular, a wealthy oilman/client for money. I guess my persuasive powers as an attorney were good – because I sold them on the idea – and borrowed with no collateral! Of course, as you can imagine, the Cayman Diver was Spartan. We had a bunkroom for six, three tiny doubles, two heads and one cold water shower. My motto was: Give them the best diving in the Caribbean, the best food, and the best service, and they will ignore the accommodations. I was right, apparently, because it worked for eight years. I officially started the Cayman Diver the same year, to my knowledge being the first in the Caribbean. The only other person interested in liveaboards for divers at that time was Bret Gilliam who started his Virgin Diver only a few years later.”

Following those two vessels, the modern liveboard business began to boom... big and worldwide. As Paul Humann had stated: Divers just love to jump in the water anytime on remote reefs that are not crowded by other tourists. About ten years later while working as editor of the Swiss diving magazine Aquanaut, I was on an assignment to do a feature article on the Ocean Quest International operation that had just started business with the largest dive vessel ever operated.

Now, I had just attended the dive briefing session with nearly 160 other divers and our Captain, Bret Gilliam, had outlined the various dive sites that included coral gardens, caves, the Great Blue Hole off Belize, shark viewing points, drift dives, steep drop-offs, and other things of interest that could be visited from the ship's twelve dive boats. I was used to North American dive operators being extremely strict about depth limits and other “rules” but Gilliam's demeanor suggested that they might be more open to personal choices about dive profiles. So I asked him about

Paul Humann

Paul Humann took up scuba diving and underwater photography in the early 1960s. Within a few years, several of his fish portraits were featured in Skin Diver magazine's memorable Fish of the Month series. Paul became one of PADI's early dive instructors, holding ID #2222. In 1972 he left his law practice in his hometown, Wichita Kansas, to pioneer today's live-aboard diving craze by becoming captain/owner of the M/V Cayman Diver, the Caribbean's first successful live-aboard dive cruiser. His underwater photographs have appeared

in numerous magazines including Skin Diver, Ocean Realm, Sport Diver, National Geographic, Audubon and many others. An ABC sports special featured Paul introducing famed Jaws author Peter Benchley to the wondrous marine life of Galapagos. Paul has authored two large-format underwater pictorial books and co-authored, with his long-time partner Ned DeLoach nine marine life field guides including the popular Reef Set trilogy, Reef Fish Identification, Reef Creature Identification, and Reef Coral Identification - Florida, Caribbe-

an, Bahamas. Paul's work established visual identification criteria for many marine animals. Long hours of observation, documentation, cataloging and corresponding with dozens of taxonomic scientists were essential steps in the long process. In many instances picture/voucher specimen collection was required to make positive identifications. As a result, many of his pictures were the first ever published of living species in their natural habitat. The specimens from this work now reside in the Smithsonian's National History collection.

These efforts made it possible for underwater naturalists to make valid non-impact biodiversity assessments of reef ecosystems. His concern for the welfare of the marine environment led him to co-found with Ned DeLoach, the Reef Environmental Education Foundation (REEF) in 1990. In 2007 Paul received the 2006 DEMA Reaching Out Award for his lifetime achievement and was inducted into the International Scuba Diving Hall of Fame. In 2010, he will be honored with the NOGI award.



“Now this is the way to go diving – jump in the water anytime you want and be remote enough you didn't have to put up with swarms of other divers.”

Paul Humann



doing some deep dives. He immediately said to sign up for the advanced boat that he would be on and we'd go to some of the best walls. I did and figured I'd still be limited to about 30 meters. When we arrived at the site, Gilliam asked me about my experience and if I was comfortable doing deep dives. I explained that I had dived for years and regularly did deeper diving when I had the chance. He shrugged and said to join him and to signal when we reached a depth where I wanted to stop and tour the wall.

We splashed in at the top of the wall and exchanged Okay signals as we began our descent down a beautiful drop-off. As we passed 30 meters I expected that he would begin to stop but the plunge continued well past 50 meters towards a heavily forested deep pinnacle that loomed below us. We leveled off and I checked my watch and depth gauge: three minutes, 70 meter. As we began to swim through the fantastic site, I realized - not for the first time - but very happily, that this was not a typical U.S. diving operation. Gilliam signaled to ask if I was okay with the depth and I nodded my head in enthusiasm. He checked my air gauge for tank pressure and we were off to explore the deep reef... loaded with schools of fish, black coral, 20-foot tall orange sea fans, manta rays, and some sharks out in the blue. This was unlike any

THE GREAT BLUE HOLE
at Lighthouse Reef atoll in Belize



THE LIGHTHOUSE STRUCTURE on Sandy Cay at Lighthouse Reef atoll in Belize



Paul Humann with early Nikonos camera system 1968



Paul Humann receives "Reaching Out" award 2006

dive I had ever done. After about 15 minutes we began ascent and began our decompression. It was fantastic and so relaxed. The other two divers in our group all acted as if this was routine for them. When we got back on the dive boat, we cruised over for a tour of the old lighthouse and killed an hour and half of surface interval. Gilliam then rounded us up and asked what we'd like to do next. Everyone said they'd love to do something as exciting as the first dive. He checked everyone's dive computers and offered another site that would take us to about 50 meters. And again, we were off following his dive briefing. Another great dive was made and then we headed back to the ship for lunch.

As we traveled, I told Gilliam that I had never been on a dive where no depth rules were enforced. He looked at me and smiled, "The rules we have are simply based on separating divers by their ability, experience, and interest. If you want to dive deep, fine. Just demonstrate control, monitor your air supply, and observe the required decompression. We're here to give you the best dives we can but with safety as our highest priority." As I headed off to the luxury dining room for the buffet and they served me a cold beer with lunch, I began to think that I had somehow landed in a foreign diving universe - if not to say divers paradise. This was nothing like I expected from a U.S. diving operation and it would only get better as the week went on.

Diving as a sport got its start when the early participants simply swam off the beach or shoreline to get to close sites. Later small dive boats emerged to gain access to farther locations. The first true diving vessels began in the mid-1970s and became known as liveaboards since the divers

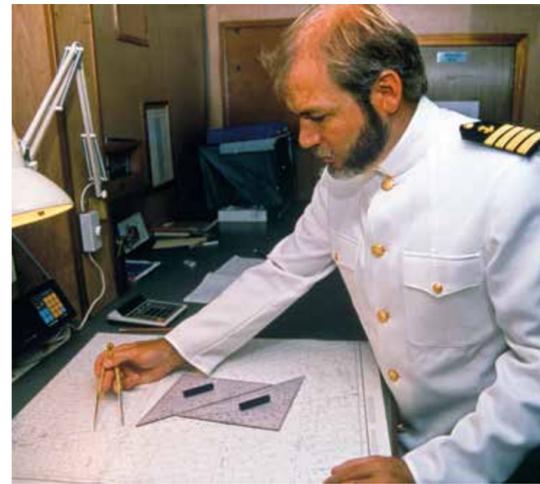
did all their activities for a week based on the floating hotels. The big difference from the land-based resorts was that these hotels moved several times a day and anchored over remote virgin sites that few divers had ever had the chance to visit before. The first two such liveaboards were Paul Humann's 75-ft. Cayman Diver and Bret Gilliam's 88-ft. Virgin Diver. Carl Roessler, who owned Sea & See Travel, the first and premier dive travel organization by that time, had suggested the concept to both men and the idea of unlimited diving from a comfortable and well-equipped yacht was born. Although these two vessels did a capable job, the next generation of liveaboards was larger and more luxurious. The first of the new series was the Cayman Aggressor, a converted commercial crew boat designed to take staff out to oil rigs in the Gulf of Mexico. Once renovated for diving, a new standard of comfort was realized and a worldwide fleet of custom liveboard vessels materialized offering private cabins, proper chefs, full air conditioned interiors, and well-appointed salons with televisions and video taped movie libraries. How could it get any better? Well, it did.

In addition to owning the Virgin Diver for several years in the eastern Caribbean, Gilliam also had one of the most successful dive operations and resorts on St. Croix. His diving guests were offered three dives a day from his land-based resort... again with no restrictions. His policy was to hire experienced staff to offer whatever level of assistance was needed to divers or to let them dive on their own following the thorough dive site briefings. His system worked: guests loved the freedom and for 15 years he operated with a perfect safety record before selling he company in 1985. Gilliam also had a fleet of luxury motor



OCEAN QUEST INTERNATIONAL'S
FLAGSHIP OCEAN SPIRIT 1989

CAPT. BRET GILLIAM at navigation table
aboard Ocean Spirit 1989



yachts that ranged in size from 110 feet to 380 feet. They offered the highest quality of tropical vacations and also included full water sports activities with scuba diving as an option. Even the largest vessels usually carried only about twelve guests since as the size of the yachts grew, so did the spacious stateroom suites. His clients included wealthy businessmen and their families, movie stars, rock & roll musicians, and others that could afford charter rates that hit 75,000 dollar a week – a fortune in that era. But diving remained Gilliam's true passion and he sold the yacht fleet in 1987 to join a group from New Orleans who had sought him out to help design a business model to take diving to a stratospheric level. Their idea was to acquire a modern cruise ship and re-do it to accommodate guests specifically focused on diving. But in a style never seen before. They named the company Ocean Quest International. Originally, the group had intended to get a far smaller ship and use small flat-top pontoon style outboard boats to take out divers. But Gilliam explained that this would limit their route itinerary and not offer the comfort, style, and safety of setting up a far larger ship. They eventually agreed and Gilliam found Norwegian Cruise Line's original flagship Sunward 1 for sale in the Mediterranean. A deal was promptly made to purchase the 525-ft., 28,000-ton ship and it was sent to Singapore for a complete renovation that cost nearly eleven million dollars. Staterooms were enlarged, suites were constructed, and a complete refurbishment of the entire interior and exterior was done. Now re-named Ocean Spirit, the ship featured four restaurants, three entertainment lounges with live entertainment, a large fresh water swimming pool, a casino, several high-end gift shops, a spa, four sun

decks, outdoor bars, and other modern amenities. The vessel now accommodated 340 passengers in complete luxury with even a 200-seat theater showing the latest Hollywood movie releases. The professional staff of 210 officers, crew, hotel, and dive staff looked after their service. But that was just the beginning. Gilliam converted the ship's main cargo deck that used to serve to carry passengers' cars and chauffeured limos as they toured Europe and the Med to now store a dozen 36 foot custom dive boats that each carried 18 divers and three dive staff. Gilliam also installed a large recompression chamber to safely treat any incidences of decompression sickness with a medically trained staff. He set up two of Bauer's largest air compressors and a high-pressure storage system that could contain 200,000 cubic feet of compressed air at about 330 bar. He designed a unique fill system built into each dive boat so a single high-pressure hose could be connected to a master fitting and all 42 dive tanks of each smaller dive boats could be filled at once... in five minutes... without ever coming out of their racks on the boat. And six boats could utilize the fill system at once as they docked alongside. This allowed the guests to do two dives in the morning, come back to the ship for lunch, and all the dive tanks would be filled, and the boats cleaned and rinsed down in less than 30 minutes. Imagine filling over 500 scuba tanks in that time frame. And all the fills were done from the storage bank so the compressors didn't need to be operated at all until at night to refill the massive cylinders in the bank. After lunch, the guests would depart again for the afternoon's two more dives. Following a return for dinner, night dives were offered. The ship routinely did over 1200 dives a day... more than some liveaboards and resorts do in a



CAPT. BRET GILLIAM and Medical Assistant
inside recompression chamber



OCEAN QUEST DIVE BOATS
coming alongside the ship

**CAPT. BRET GILLIAM'S CUSTOM-
DESIGNED LAUNCHING SYSTEM**
for the ship's 12 dive boats



month! In addition to a crane that lifted the dive boats back aboard at the end of the day to be stored inside the new working deck, the area also had a 1000 square feet diving locker with complete equipment for 250 divers and an additional 550 scuba tanks. The dive boat's tanks never had to be removed from their racks on the boats. And guests could leave their equipment and cameras set up and stored there ready for the next day of activity. At the end of the day's diving, they just stepped back aboard the main ship and were off to their cabins. Nothing to carry, rinse off, or hang up. It was effortless. It was also the largest diving operation in history worldwide. To this day, nothing has even come close to equaling the massive Ocean Quest operation. Gilliam laughs, "When we conceived the idea of a cruise ship dedicated to serious divers, it was almost beyond the grasp of the industry at the time. I had one travel broker come up to me and ask me if our vessel was as big as the Cayman Aggressor. I told her that we could lift the Aggressor aboard and float it in our pool on the back deck. That seemed to put the size of our ship into a

comparison perspective that she could understand."

The Ocean Spirit offered an eight-day, seven nights cruise that visited Cozumel, Mexico; Turneffe and Lighthouse Reef Atolls in Belize; and Roatan and Guanaja in the Bay Islands of Honduras. Gilliam scouted all the sites in advance and installed moorings so no anchoring damaged the underwater environment. Each of the twelve dive boats cruised at 25 knots and went off in different areas up to 15 miles away from the main ship so no dive sites were crowded or used by more than one boat at a time. Gilliam: "I wanted to provide the luxury and comfort of a large ship but the small group diving of a conventional liveaboard. We were also the first operation to offer dive computers as standard equipment to all our guests. They were such a new concept in 1989 that we developed the first specialty certifications for diving with these devices instead of conventional dive tables. The first year alone our staff certified over 10,000 "computer specialty divers". Of course, we also offered full certifications at all levels from new divers to instructors from the training agencies. This

way we could have people come aboard who had never dived before and take their training with us and become advanced divers with 20 or 30 dives logged by the end of the week."

When I was aboard in 1989 I did all my dives on the dive boat with Gilliam and each day offered new sites and a variety of experiences. One of the best was diving the Great Blue Hole in Belize that was first explored by the Cousteau team aboard Calypso. The depth there is about 150 meters and the upper chambers feature underwater stalactites up to ten meters in length hanging from the cave ceilings. My article in Aquanaut was titled "Love Boat" and was the cover story featuring a photo of me taken by Gilliam on the deep drop-off wall at Lighthouse Reef atoll. We have been friends now for nearly 25 years and worked on many journalism projects together since. And even after my first dive with Bret, I knew that I met an extraordinary deep diver - and I was right. In 1990 Bret dove to 452 feet in Roatan and set the new world record for depth.

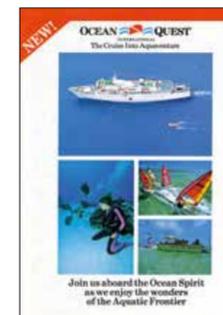
In late 1990 after three years of operation, Gilliam and his partners sold the ship to Sea Escape Cruise Lines for a massive profit. He reflects, "We were offered a price that we couldn't refuse and took it. The Ocean Quest experience

made history and was one of the favorite periods in my career. I doubt if there will ever be another operation like it again. In today's era, the costs would simply be staggering. But we made it happen then with a bit of vision and some opportune purchasing. I still have guests coming up to me and telling how much fun they had. It was a vision of diving previously unrealized and I was privileged to be part of it."

Bret Gilliam stayed in the dive business for many more years - dealing with safe deep diving and dive computers that had just started to change the way of diving. Today he is very much occupied by dive related legal business - that area of expertise his friend Paul came from when he started his own diving career.

Paul Humann went from the liveaboard business into publishing and being one great photographer - very successfully. Best known to nearly all divers worldwide are his fish/sea life identification books from New World Publishing. His idea to do such a series that all divers are looking for came him on board the Cayman Diver.

Dietmar W. Fuchs with Bret Gilliam



OCEAN QUEST BROCHURE 1989

AQUANAUT MAGAZINE'S cover story
on Ocean Quest featuring author Dietmar
Fuchs on Belize drop-off wall, 1989

Divers are Mariners!

A very obvious statement, that can be emphasized by wearing a dive watch incorporating the moon phase. Why? because it's the moon that controls our tides and its the tides that control sailing. What better argument to implement the moon phase into a real diving watch. No wonder the Fif-

ty Fathoms moon phase watch is the best seller in the Fifty Fathoms family combining the best of two worlds, the rough but beautifully designed housing of the Fifty Fathoms with the finest complications Blancpain is so famous for.