

Editor: Jack Morrison  
Contributing Editors: Keith Waugh,  
Alison Fuller-Shapcott & Andy Murray  
Other Contributors: Terry Brennan  
and Louise McFarlane

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**Advertising information and  
subscription details - Contact:**

**Terry Brennan,**  
The Freetime Initiative  
5 Craighall House,  
58a High Craighall Road, Glasgow G4 9UD  
Tel: 0141 332 3933 / 0141 332 8643  
email: [freetime@tfti.demon.co.uk](mailto:freetime@tfti.demon.co.uk)

Correspondence to:  
The Scottish Diver, The Cockburn Centre,  
40 Bogmoor Place, GLASGOW G51 4TQ  
Tel/Fax: 0141 425 1021  
email: [ab@hqssac.demon.co.uk](mailto:ab@hqssac.demon.co.uk)  
website: [www.scotsac.com](http://www.scotsac.com)  
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## CONTENTS

Sept/Oct 2005 - VOL 45 No 5

- 5 ..... Going Overboard
- 6 ..... Shotlines
- 10 ..... It All Started in Oban
- 14 ..... The Philippines
- 17 ..... Diver Profile
- 18 ..... Malta Memories
- 22 ... Icelandic Adventure
- 26 ..... Holiday Diver
- 30 ..... Seasearch Update
- 32 ..... Diveshop
- 37 ..... Branchlines

### COVER PHOTO

The crystal clear  
water of Silfra,  
Iceland

Photo courtesy of  
Lee Brown



ONE OF the most quoted lines of Burns is "Oh that God the gift waud gie us, tae see oorselves as ithers se us". Sadly the only time we divers get to see ourselves as others see us is at a fatal accident inquiry.

Sheriff Douglas Small has just published his findings into a fatal accident in the Firth of Lorne on August 2001. Briefly, two divers entered the water from a hard boat. The first never surfaced but swam underwater toward a buoyed shot line; his buddy swam on the surface. As the first diver reached the line the buoy was seen to dip under then come back up.

The divers still on board shouted at the second diver to come back but she either never heard them or perhaps she could see her buddy was having difficulty and went to his assistance.

Nine minutes later the first diver was seen floating on the surface his body was recovered but resuscitation was unsuccessful, the second diver has never been found.

During recovery his fully inflated weight integrated BCD was removed and sank. As divers you are probably thinking a diver who pulls a buoy under and whose BCD can't keep his cylinder afloat is possibly overweighted. However the Sheriff did not see that as a contributory factor. His findings were that if a thunderflash had been used to recall the second diver then she might be alive to-day.

He goes on to say that it is not possible to comment with any degree of certainty that it would have been possible to recall the first diver or that he would be in a position to respond. What would you do?

I'm pretty sure most, if not all, of us would ignore the signal and try to help our buddy, after all that is what we are taught and why we dive in pairs.

The sheriff reserves his criticism for the organisers and makes several recommendations for expedition leaders. Before they are allowed to run their own they should assist on several expeditions first. Either he didn't ask the right questions or chose to ignore them, but I'm sure some of the expert



photo courtesy Jim Anderson

## going overboard

witnesses told him dive organisations already do that.

This was a club expedition, not a branch one, which makes it harder for the leader to know the capabilities of each diver. This raises a possible problem identified by the coastguard speaker at Divewise.

Their fear is that a group of inexperienced divers, who may never have been in a club and never met, will arrange an expedition on an internet forum. Pity the poor charter skipper who has to deal with a boat load of divers who have only ten dives each demanding to be taken offshore to some remote dive site with no experience of tides etc. That's not I repeat not what happened in this incident. We have chosen to be divers; therefore we must accept responsibility for our own actions. It is unreasonable, in my opinion, to expect any surface procedure to help divers in trouble underwater.

*Jack Morrison*

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