

## **SPRING DOWN UNDER**

by

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If I had discovered a long time ago how much fun scuba diving is, I would have been a marine biologist. Since my course wasn't plotted in that direction, I guess I'll just dive for pleasure instead. Last summer I achieved my recreational diving certification, then my advanced certification. These give me the confidence to dive safely wherever I go. So far, Lake Jocassee and several freshwater springs near Aculuchee, Florida, have been the extent of my travels.

As temperatures rise on toward Summer, many local divers will come out of hibernation. Says Mike Atkins, local scuba shop owner, "Spring is the start of our busiest season. We run wide open through the Fall. Divers who don't get a chance to travel to Florida or the Bahamas during the winter are like grumpy old bears until the weather warms up."

Rick Smith, a grumpy old bear who broke down and went to Jinnie Springs, Florida, recently, says, "If I don't get to dive regularly, I get depressed. I love diving, and divers are just good people. That's why I took all the courses to become a dive master — so I can be around to help other divers enjoy the sport as much as I do."

Scott and Joan Kimbrell, a husband-wife dive team, both agree that diving is an unmatched experience for them. "Few things are more intimate between married couples than being dive partners. (Aside: "No, I'm not talking about sex, Rick.") You rely on each other to keep the dive safe and enjoyable."

Diving is a team effort. You and your partner plan dives together, check each other's gear for integrity, and constantly watch each other while underwater. At first, the equipment

seems daunting. But, the more you dive, the more comfortable the gear becomes. To name the required scuba gear: buoyancy control device (BCD), similar to a floatation device, air tank, primary and secondary (emergency) air regulators, pressure and depth gauge, thermometer, dive computer (optional, but calculates nitrogen buildup in the body based on time and depth), diving suit (from bathing suit up to dry suit, depending on water temperature), fins, mask, and weight belt (to help control buoyancy).

The cost of diving gear is no greater than a good desktop computer (between \$3000 - \$5000.) A lot depends on the level of diving you wish to do. Equipment can be rented inexpensively for a weekend dive or two. If you want to dive regularly, it pays to own. Each tank of air runs only \$3.50. Other costs are gasoline to get there, lodging if overnight, and food. Lots of food. Divers are like ravenous beasts after the exertion of a dive!

All of my life I've watched oceanographic shows like Jacques Cousteau and National Geographic Specials, but to actually swim with the fishes — there's nothing like it. On my recent trip to Devil's Den Spring, Florida, a sixty pound catfish dropped down from a rocky crevasse above me. At first, I thought it was another diver about to kick me in the mask with his fin. Then I shined my flashlight on it. Wow! What a stew that fish would have made. It was then I checked the time out of habit and discovered my non-waterproof Timex watch was still on my wrist. At fifty-two feet deep, that Timex (TM) took a lickin' and kept on tickin'!

The moral to this story is: don't wait too long to do something you've always wanted to do. I'm still kicking myself for all the years of enjoyment I've missed. Now if I can only convince my wife to try it too....