

skin diver

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IN CANADA
\$2.00



FOREMOST AUTHORITY IN ITS FIELD SEPTEMBER 1982

DIVING'S POET LAUREATE:
STAN WATERMAN

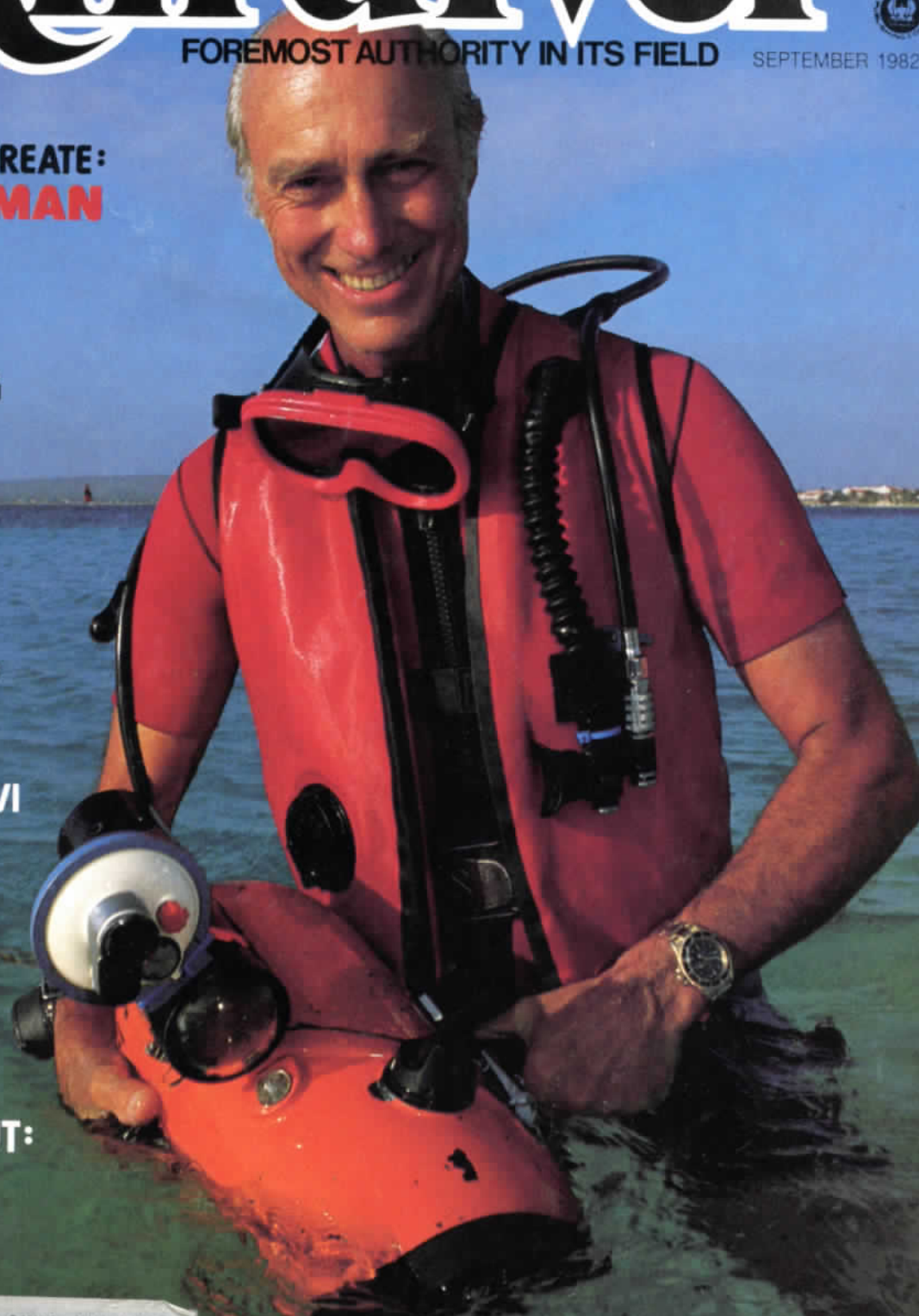
NEW ZEALAND
FOR EXOTIC DIVING

DEVILFISH DUO
FIRST PICTURES
OF RARE FISH

SPECIAL THIS ISSUE:
DIVER'S GUIDE
TO BATTERIES

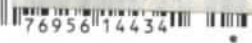
THE BEST OF THE BVI
CALIFORNIA'S
SANTA CRUZ
ISLAND

PREMIUM CLIP OUT:
SSI DIVE TABLES



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What island lies 23 miles off the Santa Barbara coastline, recently became part of Southern California's first National Park, and is the largest in the Channel Islands chain? The answer, of course, is Santa Cruz. It is 21 miles long and from 2 to 7 miles wide. Its 62,000 acres include over 75 miles of pristine coastline, two mountain ranges towering 1500 feet and a pastoral central valley. It appears to be a miniature continent from the mainland.

Before the Spanish explorers arrived in 1542, Santa Cruz was inhabited by Chumash Indians. Archaeologists have found over 100 village sites and artifacts which illustrate these early inhabitants' dependence upon and closeness with the sea. With the arrival of Spanish explorer, Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo, life for these peaceful people who had been on the island more than 7000 years, began to change.

Early writings of the explorers tell of an incident when a missionary visited the Chumash and mistakenly left an iron cross on the island. The Indians returned the cross to its owner, and henceforth the island was known as the "Island of the Holy Cross." As time passed, these intrusions eventually led to the extinction of the Chumash enclave.

Over the ensuing years, the island has changed hands several times and has served as a prison, a feudal estate, and of late, a sheep and cattle ranch.

Today, a conservation partnership exists between the Nature Conservancy and the Santa Cruz Island Company. Included within the boundaries of the new Channel Islands National Park, the Santa Cruz Island Project of the Nature Conservancy will provide for continued protection, research and educational use of this privately-owned island.

The island itself has changed little over the years. Waves still pound its basaltic cliffs forming caves and secret grottoes filled with the strange sounds of resting sea lions. The island fox continues its daily hunts around the cactus covered headlands and the elusive Santa Cruz jays still find seclusion in the island ironwood. Man has made his mark, but it has been kept to a minimum by those who care.

Today, as in the days of the Spanish explorers, visitors are awed by the rocky shoreline, terraced plateaus and high mountain ranges. These present-day explorers can still find excitement at Santa Cruz island, but in a slightly different way—diving the emerald green waters that surround the island. Although access to the island itself is limited and restricted, the waters surrounding it are not. At all times of the year, divers travel from afar to visit the sheltered coves, sea caves and offshore rocky areas.

On a recent visit, I found the island lived up to its historic reputation. Weath-



Photo: Robb Evans

Santa Cruz

Island of the Holy Cross
—and a lot of good diving

BY ALAN HELLER



photos/Jack Dratahi



photo/Bob Evans



Opposite page: sunlight streams through a kelp canopy. Left: a diver examines a jellyfish. Below, left to right: an angel shark; small cave; and cormorants on a steep, rocky shore.



photo/Bob Evans

red volcanic cliffs on the northeastern part of the island give way to small isolated coves where freshwater streams from the interior finally touch the ocean. Caves are numerous and surge plumes mark their underwater entrances. One such cave is found at Scorpion Anchorage, in the large rock that marks its western boundary. Lobster, swell sharks and an occasional playful sea lion are likely to be encountered on a dive at this spot. The cave itself should be entered cautiously and with proper equipment and training. It extends several hundred feet into the interior of the island and a free ascent might not be possible.

A little further west a small sheltered cove named Potato Harbor marks another dive spot. The water is clear and the rocky bottom is well-suited for the avid close-up photographer. Strawberry anemones and nudibranchs abound and

large sheephead come in to examine the curious interloper.

Traveling on, the diver will find Painted Cave. Here, even the novice diver can penetrate the gaping entrance. In fact, because of its monstrous size, a whole dive boat can enter. At its deepest reaches sea lions moan at intruders and slide into the blackness to escape. Looking down into the waters at the entrance, its calm surface appears to be a giant aquarium. Fish dart through a myriad of plant life and camera shy sea lions race to evade the underwater photographers.

Frazier Cove is found at the western extremity of the island. Anchoring here is safe at certain times of the year, and the area can be a fascinating dive spot. The western area of the cove harbors some of the most abundant displays of black abalone. Twenty-five legal blacks can be counted in one small crevice—illustrating

perhaps how the prehistoric Chumash Indians were able to thrive.

At Gull Island, a diver-photographer becomes further enchanted. Kelp rises to the surface and marine plants cover the rocks and crevices. Sheephead swim by and tempt the hunter, while green abalone can be spotted here and there on rocky outcroppings close to the sandy bottom.

Finally, at Yellow Banks, a place marked on shore by huge yellow cliffs, a diver can make a last attempt for abalone. The more or less flat rocky bottom with scattered small reefs offers good hiding places for abs.

Heading back to the mainland after a day at Santa Cruz, cooled by the sea spray, a diver can reflect on an unforgettable dive experience and make plans for a return to the Island of the Holy Cross another day. ➤