Parting Shot 1

Jacques Cousteau reportedly proclaimed Ginnie Springs as “the clearest water on earth”. Ginnie Springs, located near Gainesville, Florida, has four diveable springs – the Ginnie ballroom, the Devil’s Ear, the Devil’s Eye, Little Devil, and Dogwood spring. The Devil’s system is a cave diver’s paradise with 30,000 feet of tunnels, but the springs are also a very popular site for open water divers.

The most popular spring, the Ginnie Ballroom, is a cavern whose entrance begins in about eighteen feet of water. The opening is about six feet in width and immediately opens into a thirty foot chamber with a nine foot ceiling. Then there is a large sloping room of approximately 60 feet by 70 feet which angles downward to a depth of 60 feet. A large grate prevents divers from entering the cave system.

The Devil’s Eye is a round shaft of limestone that begins in about six feet of water and drops to 20 feet where it meets the cave entrance. The Devil’s Eye connects to the Devil’s Ear, another entrance into the cave system at the river’s edge. The third spring, Little Devil is a forty foot long fissure that drops to forty five feet. For safety reasons, only certified cavern or cave divers are allowed to dive with lights in the Devil’s Spring system.

Dogwood Spring is a small spring around 12 feet deep and is primarily enjoyed by snorkelers.

All of these springs have been incorporated into one of Florida’s best camping and recreational parks, complete with bathrooms, hot showers, a full service dive shop, and a country store.



Canon 40D, Aquatica housing, Tokina 10-17 lens at 10mm, f10, 1/640 sec, ISO 200, ambient light

The springs here are a year round 72 degrees and flow into the Santa Fe River which often flows dark with tannin. The tannin in the river contrasts with the crystal clear water exiting the springs making for beautiful photography. The accompanying photograph was taken after exiting a cave dive from the Devil’s Ear spring shooting up into the river with the diver silhouetted against the noonday sun.

Douglas Ebersole
www.debersole.com

Parting Shots 2

I was lucky enough to have the time and money to join Alex Mustard in Indonesia earlier this year. A predominantly British group travelled out to the Lembeh strait, where we were later joined by a few more divers and headed east in a small and somewhat rickety turboprop aircraft to the wonders of Raja Ampat.

This is the story of the first week, in Lembeh:

The Lembeh Resort sits facing the volcanoes of the large island of Sulawesi, which are almost enough, at sunset, to distract the keenest underwater photographer from the delights hidden in the volcanic muck of the strait itself (frogfish, lacy Ambon scorpionfish and mating mimic octopus, to mention but a little of what we found). It was the first time in such "critter" richness for me, but my obsession was with the mandarinfish…

Now, I've visited Mabul in Malaysian Borneo, and missed the mandarinfish there, so they became another of my "if only I could get a shot of that" wish-list. I'm pretty sure that most photographers end up haunted by these wish-lists.

… anyway, five minutes' swim from the showers at Lembeh resort is a thicket of fine stag coral that is home to a community of mandarinfish, pyjama cardinalfish and banded pipefish. The perfect opportunity to shorten my wish-list! Or so I thought…

Mandarinfish perform in the evening, darting out of the coral in mating pairs; there is about a second to grab a shot in the failing light as the sun hides behind the volcanoes.

On the first night I took a 105mm micro-Nikkor lens to capture the small mandarinfish:



fantastic! For about ten minutes the mandarins were shooting out of the coral, spawning, and dashing back… except that my red focus light completely failed to work with the long lens and my D200. Great dive, no images.

On the second night I was determined: I missed a great dive out in the strait, but the mandarins were going to be mine: 60mm lens, fast AF, I knew where the fish were, great! Except for two divers with video… which need bright, white lights, and if there is one thing that mandarinfish do not like, it's bright light. So, no fish at all.

On the third night, despite the absence of video, there weren't any fish near me: over there, yes, and then if I moved, back where I had been, but in front of my lens? No, none at all.

By this time the other members of the team were a bit worried, after all, everyone has pictures of mandarinfish, haven't they? I succumbed to the octopus, squid, scorpionfish, frogfish that were keeping everyone else entertained. But, there was the wish-list…

… one night remaining, I went back to the coral thicket. A little flicker of movement, a hint of blue and orange: there, in the depths of the coral a large male. Was there a female? Yes! Slowly



moving through the dusky water… a fraction of a second later rushing a few centimetres above the coral spines, in the viewfinder, flash! One shot.

That was it, six-and-half hours, and one shot.

And the volcano sunset was there every night, at the same time, before the night dives that I missed because of mandarinfish obsession.

Tim Priest

Parting Shot 3

The island of Niihau is located 17 miles southwest of Kauai, and is often referred to as Hawaii's "forbidden island". It's been largely off limits to visitors since 1864, when Elizabeth Sinclair purchased the island from King Kamehameha V.

Niihau has remained in the ownership of her descendants (the Robinsons), who've attempted to preserve the Hawaiian culture and language among the small population by preventing any influx of settlers from the outside world.

As the waters around Niihau aren't privately owned, anyone can visit on a boat provided they don't actually land. To get out there, you must base yourself on Kauai, and be prepared for early starts and a possibly rough crossing of the Kaulakahi Channel of 1.5 to 2 hours outbound and up to 2.5 hours on the return leg. Most of the dive sites are centred around Lehua Rock, a spectacular semi-submerged crater located off Niihau's north east.

We knew from our research that we'd have "a chance" of Hawaiian Monk Seal encounters in these waters and at best we hoped for a swift "fly past". However, our expectations were raised during the dive briefing for Vertical Awareness (which as the name suggests, is a vertigo inducing wall dive) when the dive guides explained how to behave around the seals.

Although sometimes curious of divers, Hawaiian Monk Seals are often skittish and wary, and are more likely to stick around if divers don't swim directly at them. Instead, a slower and more "meandering" approach tends to be more successful and if you're able to get close, it's a good idea to ensure that the seal has enough space to make an exit. Sporadic rather than constant eye contact were also considered good advice as it's thought that the seals finds it less threatening.

And so, we were treated to some amazing Hawaiian Monk Seal encounters, most memorably at Vertical Awareness where we were able to approach to within touching distance of one individual whilst it rested on the rocky plateau close to the wall.

Every few minutes, the seal would surface for air and return to the same spot. In this image, the seal appears to be "laughing" at Scott, one of the dive guides. Sometimes, the "monk" (as some locals call them) would vocalize with a throaty growl which is thought be territorial before relaxing to check out its own reflection in my dome port as I tentatively edged closer. Even the crew considered our encounter very special.



Nikon D200/Subal housing combination with a 10.5mm fisheye and Subtronic strobe. Settings were 1/40th, f8 and ISO100.

The "forbidden island" of Niihau is the "wild frontier" of diving in the Hawaiian Islands and rewards the visitor with some spectacular underwater experiences. It's truly world class and full of photographic potential. And it's probably the best place to get encounters with one of world's most endangered marine mammals, the Hawaiian Monk Seal.

Jeremy Cuff
www.ja-universe.com

Do you have a nice shot with a short story behind it?
If so e mail me
and yours could be the next "Parting shot".
peter@uwpmag.com