

EXCU-U-S E ME!

Recently we were informed by yet another customer that someone was once again passing judgment on the way some of our divers dive. For many years we have heard (through the grapevine) that these kind of negative remarks have been made about the choices we make in diving. Most of these remarks, unfortunately, seem to come from personnel in other area dive establishments. What's worse, most of these comments are made without any real knowledge of the type of divers we are or the type of training we undertake to ensure our safety. We would like to take this opportunity to dispel some of the myths that circulate about who we are and what we do.

At Airheads Scuba we believe that everyone has the right to dive in the manner he or she chooses as long as the diving is done in a safe and prudent manner. We have always encouraged divers to dive (either with us or without us) within their training and comfort limits. We respect their right to choose the method of diving which best suits their mentality and experience level. We don't tell them they can't enjoy themselves diving in standard openwater equipment nor do we impose our more technical style of diving on anyone. After all, everyone started out as an openwater diver -- even us -- and we still enjoy that type of diving from time to time. On the other hand, we do not discourage divers from pursuing technical diving if they so desire and are willing to put forth the effort required to achieve their goal.

First myth: Those divers at Airheads are dangerous. They will get you hurt.

Truth: The regular divers at Airheads Scuba (whether recreational or technical) are extremely motivated individuals who have undergone extensive training in order to engage in their chosen dive activities safely. They believe in the value of continuing education to further their skills and knowledge. They also believe in frequent practice of their skills so that when they do make more complicated technical dives they are in the best mental and physical fitness possible for that particular dive activity. For this reason these divers are often seen at local and far-flung quarries in what appears to be very complex dive equipment. This equipment is often intimidating to divers who have not been introduced to the world of technical diving. We can well understand these feelings as we once had the same feelings ourselves.

Apart from these divers, there is another group of people who seem to take actual offense at the complexity of our equipment and our dive activities. It appears that these people are the ones who instigate and spread rumors about those "dangerous" divers at Airheads. This attitude is one we cannot comprehend.

Perhaps it is just that these people don't understand the discipline required to execute the type of dive profiles which our divers do. We believe that these naysayers operate under the mistaken assumption that we engage in this type of diving without adequate preparation or training. This is definitely not the case -- as anyone could quickly discover if he or she took the time to investigate even halfheartedly.

Second myth: Those divers at Airheads are crazy. No sane person would dive like that.

Truth: Many people are intrigued and invigorated by technical diving. It is a rapidly-growing segment of the dive industry. These divers are not crazy; to the contrary, they are very logical, methodical people. Consider the following: When an openwater diver has a problem, he or she can generally make a mad solo dash to the surface or (at worst) make a feeble attempt at sharing air with their buddy until they reach the surface. (We say "feeble" only because it is a skill that most people don't practice and therefore cannot execute effectively.) On the other hand, in most technical environments a mad dash to the surface could get a diver seriously injured or killed. The diver could be far into an overhead environment or running a very deep dive profile when a problem occurs. In either scenario, going to the surface to solve the problem is not an option. We as technical divers must know how to respond instinctively and without hesitation to problems. We also have a very healthy respect for the environments in which we dive. This is a necessary trait in order to ensure that we survive. This attitude is reflected in our dedication to training as stated above.

Third myth: Technical divers have accidents all the time because the dives they make are so risky.

Truth: Recreational divers have far more accidents than technical divers do. All the research statistics prove this. Just last week an open water diver died during an open water advanced training dive to 25 mfw (80 ffw) at Gilboa quarry in Ohio. For those who are concerned about technical divers, imagine what we, as technical divers, could think about those recreational instructors who instill in inexperienced divers the idea that they are more qualified than they actually are. This is what leads to unnecessary incidents like the one just mentioned. We at Airheads would never think to sell an advanced certification to an open water diver with only five more dives since his open water certification. EVERY CERTIFICATION ISSUED BY AIRHEADS SCUBA IS EARNED through dedication, training, and performance. We don't want any more dive sites like Plum Run in Ohio closed due to the reckless or ignorant behavior of untrained divers trying to do things which are beyond their qualifications. We know the training is available to those who seek it because we are one of the shops which provides it.

To conclude:

It occurs to us just now how many times we have used the dreaded "T" word in this article (technical). Use of this word usually brings immediate and vehement condemnation. It reminds us of the time in the mid-90's when a diver had to travel to Florida to take a Nitrox course. The mere mention of the word "nitrox" brought recriminations and forecasts of the diver's imminent demise in breathing "that devil gas". Now even shops who don't sell nitrox provide the training to become a nitrox certified diver! Every new idea in diving has always been greeted with such suspicion and fear.

The T word (technical diving) is not a bad thing, but it is different. It is also not for everyone. We engage in technical diving, but we do not pressure or even encourage others to follow suit unless they are already interested in it themselves. To go the technical route in diving is a personal choice and a very serious one. It should only be approached with the utmost consideration and self-evaluation.

If it sounds as if we at Airheads Scuba are irritated, you're right. We are tired of being slandered as unsafe or, worse, dangerous divers when we are among the safest divers in the area. Ignorance is no excuse for trying to trash a competitor, and we make a concerted effort not to engage in this type of behavior ourselves. We will, however, vigorously defend ourselves from senseless attacks on our credibility, training or manner of diving.

The only way we can combat prejudice and discrimination in the dive industry is to be knowledgeable divers ourselves. We need to question those who make broad general statements about divers or diving practices about which they seem to have little or no information. If they have no experience or knowledge base on which to found their statements, they only make themselves look ignorant and petty by belittling others.

Proud of our commitment to training and confident of our abilities, we have no problem identifying ourselves to the dive community.

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