

careers **etc.**

IN ASSOCIATION WITH



UNDER WATER CAMERA MAN



Last week the shark cage, next week world records in the Caribbean.
Who'd be an underwater cameraman, eh?



'DON'T TALK A GOOD DIVE, AND DON'T TALK A GOOD PICTURE – GO AND DO IT!'



We caught up with underwater photographer and cameraman Dan Burton just as he was packing his bags for a three-week assignment in the Caicos. 'I'm working with Tanya Streeter who's attempting a new free diving world record. I'm doing stills for magazines and shooting a video for Channel 5.'

Tough life, then? Well, yes, it is, actually. You don't get invited to follow deep water world records or photograph giant conger eels without offering years of experience and breathing a tankful of talent.

An underwater photographer since 1988, Dan studied photography at Plymouth Art College, and even there he realised that what you put in is generally what you get back. 'I used to dive five times a week. It's no accident that I was getting better results than those who went out once a week.'

Dan is now based in Exeter: 'I always dive whenever I can, hot or cold water, work or for fun...though now I don't feel properly prepared if I go without a camera.' But he still travels to London to pitch to the advertising agencies and TV companies: 'You really do have to show them what you can do. You have to be able to show them a portfolio and list trips.' One advantage Dan offers is being the first in the UK to use a digital camera. 'You can rattle off lots of shots and download them to a computer on the boat.' This saves on dive times, and on processing. Dan also builds his own camera bodies, customising them for different situations – to attach it to a static rig, or compact for inside wrecks, or robust for the increased pressure of deep water dives.

It's professionalism that helps

make the dangers rewarding rather than disastrous. 'We all have nasty moments, and you have to learn from them. Gas management is an issue, especially in deep sea diving. The biggest danger is in not being trained properly. A bloke I knew was working in a cave in the Bahamas. He wasn't properly trained and got into difficulties – he died down there.'

But you needn't travel the globe to find danger. Dan was recently working in a large aquarium in Birmingham, and was filling in the usual risk assessment form: 'I was preparing to go in this shark tank. The risks you'll face, well some are obvious – being bitten by a shark, for one – but there are many, many more. It's possible to be attacked by conger eels, or a light could fall in the water. There are slippery floors, potentially faulty breathing equipment, getting cut by rocks. You need to focus on each one, and work to minimise its risk.' Just opening his insurance premium renewal letter would be enough for many of us, but it's overcoming these dangers that adds spice to the job. 'It's one of those jobs with guaranteed built-in satisfaction. You're doing something you love and delivering results.'

What advice would Dan give an aspiring underwater cameraperson? 'You have to be a good diver before you do anything. You also need to be a good land photographer before you even think about it. It's largely the same processes, but the conditions make everything more difficult.' With camera set-ups from £600, and training courses becoming more widely available, the best advice is to get out there: 'Don't talk a good dive, and don't talk a good picture – go and do it!' *etc.*

See more of Dan's amazing work at www.underwaterimages.co.uk
Get info on diving at www.padi.com

Getting started

Deborah Sutton from diving trainers PADI gives tailor-made training advice to two budding underwater camerapeople...

Andy Clarke, 18, Notts:

'I'm a strong swimmer but I've no diving experience. I fancy myself as a budding Jacques Cousteau – can you help?'

DS: You could initially try a PADI Discover Scuba experience, a friendly one-hour session in a swimming pool. Alternatively, you could jump right in with the PADI Open Water Diver Course. With this you can dive with a buddy to a depth of 18m. There are five theory modules, five pool modules and four open water dives.

Clare Nash, 21, Middlesex:

'I've done a bit of snorkelling, and I'm handy with a handheld digital video camera. What can I do to become an underwater cameraman?'

DS: As with Andy, get an initial recreational scuba qualification such as the PADI Open Water Diver certification, and build on that experience to an appropriate level. You should also try PADI's Underwater Videographer Speciality course, which includes three video training dives.