

huge mushroom coral heads. They are so weird-looking! Joe even saw a spotted eagle ray! I was really jealous — I think anyone who didn't see it was jealous!

Later that night we listened to an inspirational tape along with every ActionQuester in the BVI. It was extremely life-changing; I'd like to tell you everything about it, but you just have to experience it on your own.

BIG ALMIGHTY HIKE

We woke up at 6 to get ready to do the big almighty hike: a five-hour trip all the way to the top of Mt. Sage and back. Casey, Shawn, John-O and Chaz all decided to run the hike! That was ridiculous. Sam and I decided to have an extreme sing-along to get through it, which was quite funny.

The hike was gorgeous. There were lush trees and some of the most breathtaking sights I have ever seen in my entire life. When Sam and I realized we were finally close to the top, we looked up to see Shawn, Casey, Chaz and John-O just jogging down, not even out of breath, saying, "You're almost there!" They rubbed it in our faces.

Jim said there was a book at the top of the hill that you sign, but when we finally got up there, there wasn't anything! He totally tricked us. And we had to go all the way back to town to have lunch.

PRESENTATIONS

Before our presentations we Dolphins had to complete the tests for all our PADI certifications, and the Neptunes had to finish theirs. We found out that we all passed — a great accomplishment that made us all quite happy.



Then it was presentation time. After all the dives we'd done, Emma and I finally had all of our information, and we gave our presentation. It turns out that our information was correct — it's true that most fish eat in the shallower areas of the reef.

IS IT OVER ALREADY?

When it was almost time to leave, we all kept talking about it. Emma even managed to slip a couple tears out, which made us all realize how soon we would be leaving. We all wrote little cards to give to each other so we could read them later.

All of the ActionQuesters met up on one of the boats after dinner. Jim and Mike told each of us what time we would be departing and talked to us about our trips. When Jim was talking he mentioned the *Cala Doro* and Chaz goes, "Can I get a NATO?" Suddenly not

only our boat, but the rest of ActionQuest goes, "NATOOOOOO!" We weren't the silly ones any more. Everyone was.

I knew I was going to miss that place — We had a million memories together.

That's what ActionQuest does: It challenges you, changes you, makes you open up to new things and befriend people you never thought you would. It opens your eyes to new experiences and opportunities.

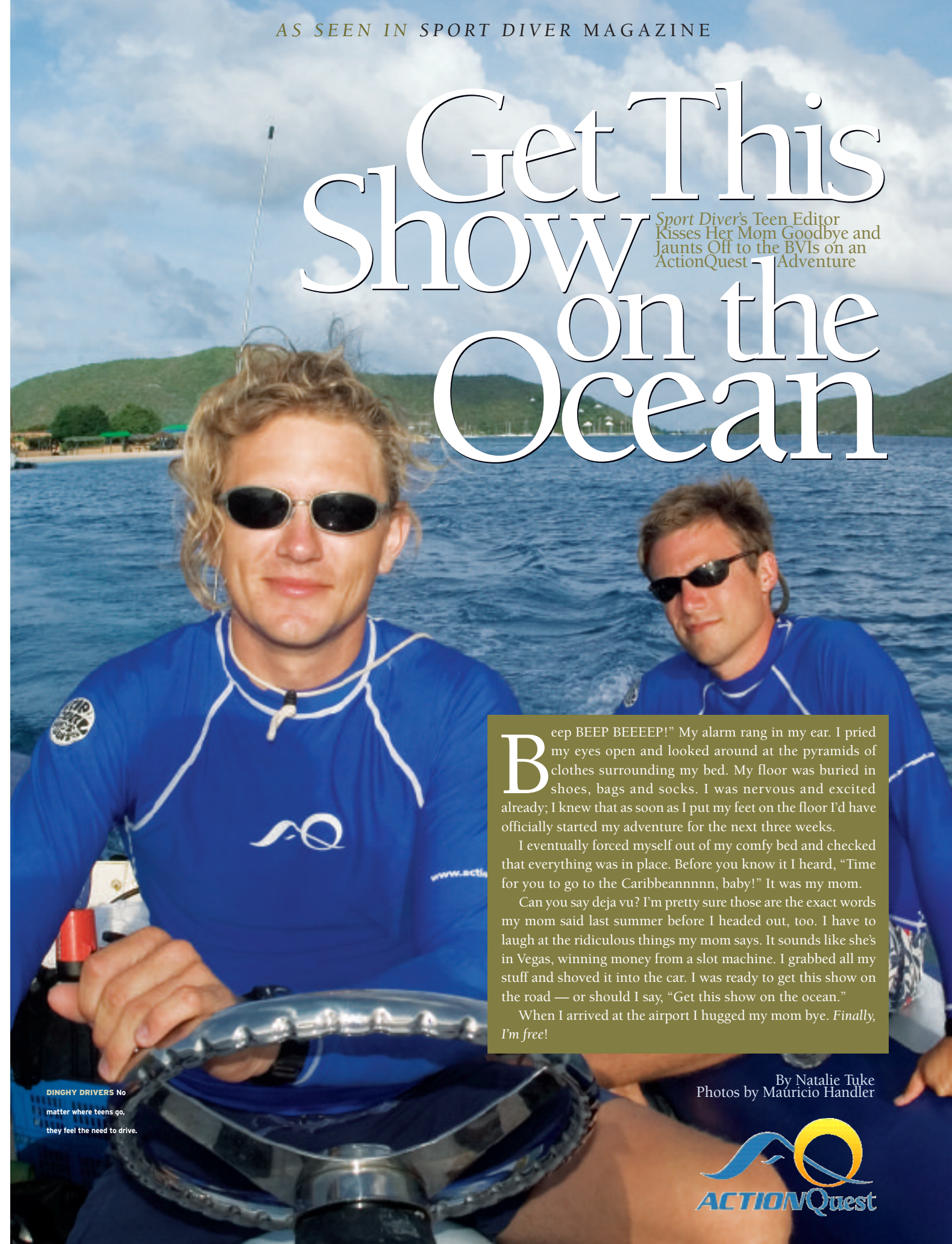
That night most of us stayed up talking. Goodbye after goodbye, our family was getting smaller and more tears would pour.

It was finally time for Sam and me to leave. I hugged everyone, trying not to cry. As the bus started to drive off all I could do was smile, knowing that this experience would be one that I'd cherish and remember forever.

Special thanks to ActionQuest.

Get This Show On the Ocean

Sport Diver's Teen Editor Kisses Her Mom Goodbye and Jaunts Off to the BVIs on an ActionQuest Adventure



Beep BEEP BEEEEEP!" My alarm rang in my ear. I pried my eyes open and looked around at the pyramids of clothes surrounding my bed. My floor was buried in shoes, bags and socks. I was nervous and excited already; I knew that as soon as I put my feet on the floor I'd have officially started my adventure for the next three weeks.

I eventually forced myself out of my comfy bed and checked that everything was in place. Before you know it I heard, "Time for you to go to the Caribbeannnnn, baby!" It was my mom.

Can you say deja vu? I'm pretty sure those are the exact words my mom said last summer before I headed out, too. I have to laugh at the ridiculous things my mom says. It sounds like she's in Vegas, winning money from a slot machine. I grabbed all my stuff and shoved it into the car. I was ready to get this show on the road — or should I say, "Get this show on the ocean."

When I arrived at the airport I hugged my mom bye. *Finally, I'm free!*

ACTIONQuest

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DINGHY DRIVERS No matter where teens go, they feel the need to drive.

By Natalie Tuke
Photos by Mauricio Handler



I slept the whole flight — next thing I knew I was in Puerto Rico Airport, standing at the gate waiting to go to Tortola in the British Virgin Islands. I saw teenagers walking around and knew that at the end of the trip I'd know more than half of them extremely well. I love how that works out.

I was still in the airport and suddenly this guy sitting next to me says, "Hi, I'm Chaz, where are you from?"

"I'm Natalie; I'm from Orlando."

"No way, no way," he said.

"Yes way. Why? Where are you from?"

I said eagerly.

"I'm from Orlando too!" Chaz said. The first person I become friends with on a trip is always very important to me, because that's the first person I'm going to remember when I think of that trip.

When we got off the plane we met with an ActionQuest guide who directed us onto a bus. I always love the bus ride because you



WHAT DID YOU DO LAST SUMMER?

Above: A secret corner of the Baths on Virgin Gorda. Top left: Teens trim the sails and earn their keep on the *Cala Doro*. Left: Nato cruising on the dinghy.

get to see the island's beauty for the first time. No one really talks because everyone is nervous and you just get to sit back and enjoy.

We arrived at a marina and checked into our boats. My boat was a catamaran called the *Cala Doro*. My counselors were Chantal and

Kate, and the skipper was John. The 11 teenagers on the *Cala Doro* were going to be in two different groups: the Dolphin group for the ones doing the Marine Biology course (which I was), and the Neptune group for the ones who were getting their advanced open water certification (which I already have).

LIFEWORKS

The next day we woke up early to do a Lifeworks orientation, where we got together and

talked about life and other things you should think about. It was really cool and made it a lot easier before we paired up to go on to our own boats.

I also got to meet Jim, the very interesting and knowledgeable man behind this program. I found out he speaks Dutch, which surprised me, and we started to talk to each other in a secret language we both knew. Totally made my day! After that we had some awesome pancakes and departed West End to

South Bay on Peter Island.

When we arrived at South Bay we did a dive briefing and skill dive. It's a piece of cake if you're comfortable with your equipment. It also can help if you have a problem with your

CONTINUING EDUCATION



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MUST DO
MUST DIVE

Bath Time
Visit the granite-boulder-lined shore of the Baths. Once a stopover for slave traders, it is now one of the most beautiful beaches in the BVIs.

- 1 The Rhone
- 2 The Indians
- 3 Chimney
- 4 Alice's Wonderland
- 5 The Aquarium

equipment you didn't know about. It's better to find out on the skill dive than on an actual dive!
I could already tell that my next few weeks were going to be packed with tons of cool events!

PLEASURE DIVING & SAVING POOR BOB
At 7:38 the next morning we set sail for Cooper Island. Our first pleasure dive was on Blue Chromis reef — what a great dive! It was a colorful reef with tons of sea fans

and black and white spotted drums, and, of course, blue chromis, which are everywhere in the BVI.
After that we sailed over to Savannah Bay and got to go water skiing! While some of us were water skiing, others did a dinghy check, where you learn how to drive the dinghy and save poor Bob. Bob was actually a dressed-up Personal Floatation Device that dutifully hung out in the water so we could practice how to save real people if they fell overboard.

FINDING THE CENTER
I woke up the next morning at 6:30 and realized that it would be the first day we start out in our

RIGGED AND READY

Reef Flip Flops
When your feet finally leave your fins, hit the pavement with flip-flops so comfortable you'll hardly know they're on. www.reef.com



Patagonia's Hawaiian Sling
This is the perfect bag to protect your dry stuff from your wet stuff. And the fact that it's stylin' doesn't hurt, either. www.patagonia.com



Water Girl Low Tide Skirt
Patagonia's little sister, Water Girl, lets you keep your beach style when you eventually get out of the water. www.watergirlusa.com



H₂O Audio
Don't let a little water keep you from rockin' out. Take your favorite tunes down to the depths with H₂O Audio's underwater MP3 player. www.h2oaudio.com





RHONE DAY Opposite: The screw of the famous Rhone — one of Nato's favorite dives in the BVIs. Above: This Atlantic Air BVI commuter plane found the runway at Dog Island a bit short.



Right before we had to leave Shawn and I found a crazy passage that brought us to the top of a rock, and we could see over the entire area. It was stunning.

We were all pretty tired, but when we got back to the boat we realized it was only 9 o'clock!

REAL FOOD AT SPANISH TOWN

We found out the next morning that we were going to Spanish Town. It had only been six days, but all the guys had been talking about was hamburgers and meat. I was hoping this trip to town would keep them quiet.

Emma and I hit a little Internet shop at the marina for a few minutes and used the phones to call home. We also went to the grocery store to buy some Jell-O and stopped by the restaurant to watch the guys indulge like carnivores.

That evening we were scheduled to do our first night dive at Mountain Point. I was really stoked — we all were! We jumped into the pitch-black ocean, turned on our lights and descended. We hung out for three minutes with no lights on so we could see bioluminescence, which is always fun. And we got a surprise when we turned on the lights — a cute squid was just cruising by us.

There's always a little flashing light tied to the line of the boat so you can find your way back when you're diving at night, but when we ascended we realized we were at our ActionQuest neighbors' boat; they were doing a dive and had their light on, too. We borrowed their dinghy to go back to our boat. Chaz started a new trend when we were getting on the dinghy. He would scream, "Can I get a NATOOOOOO?" and then everyone would go, "NATOOOOOOOO." This was only the beginning of the NATOOOOs.

TIME FOR OUR WEEKLY BATH

We woke up early the next day for a trip to the most famous site in the BVIs: the Baths, where beautiful granite boulders line the coast of Virgin Gorda. It's known to be one of the world's most gorgeous beaches. They call this area the Baths because slavers brought the slaves who survived the long trip over to the British Virgin Islands to bathe here before they were sold.

When we were approaching we could see the rocks from miles away, and they were simply breathtaking. It looked like a scene from *The Beach*. We anchored and started to explore. Chaz, Shawn, Emma, Anne, my bro Casey and I all decided to do some climbing and kind of got stuck, but we eventually made it down. Later I met up with Sam and Emma to chill in one of the pools beneath the rocks.



groups. My group made a dive at Savannah Bay to observe marine life, while Neptune brushed up on navigation skills. We watched fish and how they react to other life forms. I don't think I have ever observed this — it's quite funny, actually. Fish have quite a character. It was an eye-opener for me and got me thinking about each dive with a much different perspective.

After lunch the Dolphins headed to shore for a hike to focus on ecosystems. We walked up and down the beach picking up some interesting things, then brought them back to the group and talked about them.

We got to explore a little, and I climbed up to a high rock right on the ocean and played with snails. That used to be my favorite thing to do when I was young, and I just embraced the moment and wondered how these tiny little snails planted themselves upon these sharp rocks.

When everyone headed back to the boat, Emma and I decided to stay on the beach and swim while talking about home and experiences. This is when I think I finally felt comfortable being on the trip, because I was starting to settle in with the people around me and build relationships. There's always going to be a moment when you can finally let your guard down and open up, and this was mine.

We'd had a very long day, but it was probably one of my favorites. It wasn't hard to fall asleep that night.

JOHN-O AND THE CHIMNEY

The next day was the Chimney dive with our skipper, John-O (a name made up by Chaz). The Chimney has an unusual underwater structure: There's a short passage with multi-colored sponges growing on the walls, and little air bubbles floating along the side eventually make their way up to give a sort of chimney look from the surface.

Next we motored over to Coral Gardens where we saw a wicked plane wreck. It was in the middle of just sand, which was very cool — it was like the ocean made a special spot for this plane. There was a cute moray eel coming out of a hole in the plane, and there were tons of Christmas tree worms.

After that dive we headed on over to Long Bay, where my group discussed underwater naturalist diving.

LOCATE, ID AND DANCE

We Dolphins got to do a cool naturalist dive at Leverick Bay to locate and ID two local aquatic plants, four invertebrates and five aquatic vertebrate animals.

Later we snorkeled in the mangroves at Vixen to look at the different fish that live there. We were surprised by how much smaller the animals were in the mangrove area than they were out in the big ocean; then we discovered that they were all juveniles and that the mangroves act as great fish nursery.

After that observation, we got ready for our first dance. It ended up being really fun, especially when the whole gang pulled me onto the dance floor. Chaz yelled, "Can I get a Nato?" and everyone yelled, "NATOOOOOO!" All the other Action-Questers must have thought our boat was insane, but we didn't care — we all just laughed. At that moment I smiled and realized that I was making some of the best friends I've ever had. I wouldn't change that moment for the world.

SLEEPING IN AND MY PFD TAN

I love to sleep in. LOVE IT! And that's exactly what we got to do after the dance. We got to sleep in till 7 a.m.! (INSERT SARCASM) It's a lot better than 5:30 or 6, though. I woke up while we were sailing to Peter Island. The sail took up most of our day, and I got a horrible tan because of my PFD.

When we arrived, we were informed that we Dolphins were going to go on our first

PADI Underwater Photography specialty dive. Emma and I were buddies, and I have a million funny pictures of her from that dive, even though the dive was mainly to focus on taking pictures of underwater life. I just had to slip in some funny ones!

Something amazing happened on that dive — something that made my whole trip! My favorite fish is the juvenile trunkfish. I was



thinking, "Man, wouldn't it be amazing if I could see one? I haven't seen one since last summer!" As soon as I had that thought a little juvenile trunkfish just popped out of the rocks next to where I was taking a picture. I almost died! It must have been fate.

RHONE DAY

The *Rhone* is considered to be one of the world's best wreck dives, and that was our next dive! The *Rhone* is divided into several parts, and it takes about two dives to cover the full wreck. It's filled with schools of big-eye snapper and eels, and there's colorful coral growing off the wreck. Another cool thing is that there are bottles of wine imbedded in the wreck by coral growth.

I swear, one stoplight parrotfish had something against me — it kept swimming into my mask and nibbling at me. Shawn and Joe had a great laugh watching me scream underwater every time this fish decided to harass me!

Later that night we returned to do a short night dive at Peter Island for a navigation test. Nobody got lost and we all made it back in time for movie night — almost better than dessert for TV-starved teenagers!

SCIENTIFIC OBSERVATION

The Dolphins were officially assigned to do scientific observation for our final project. We

had to pick something to observe, come up with a hypothesis about it and then test the hypothesis.

Emma and I decided to study the eating habits of three different herbivore fish at 15 feet and 30 feet. Our initial objective was to determine if and why the food consumption of parrotfish, damselfish and blue tangs is different at different depths.

Our hypothesis was that parrotfish and other fish feed more in shallower water (15 feet) because the algae growing in the coral has more light so photosynthesis causes the reef to be more lush. We would be working on this assignment every dive we could.

Emma and I went to different areas of the reef, not too far away from each other, and created quadrants by swimming 20 kick cycles in each direction. Each of us was at a different depth, and we observed how many times fish took a bite out of the reef. We had little charts where we documented everything. At the end of all our observations we were able to make a conclusion and a chart. Pretty clever, huh?

NATO'S THREE-HOUR TOUR

On the sail to Hodges Creek I actually got to be the skipper! I learned a lot about navigating a boat (and we arrived safely) thanks to John-O.

We were getting ready to dive at Alice's Wonderland on the southwest side of Ginger Island. It was extremely rough and we all had to be very careful when getting in the water. If you learn how to dive no matter the circumstances, you'll be quite the diver, though!

When we got in the ocean, the current — surprisingly — wasn't too strong. The corals were very healthy, which always puts a smile on my face; and, of course, there were