

*Jennifer Stock:* That brings up a good question I had in terms of the similarities and differences between other sites that you've dove in California. Cordell Bank sounds completely unique. Was there any other dive sites along the coast that were sort of similar or had some similar species? And maybe you can describe those.

[25:00]

*Dave Cassotta:* I think probably the closest to just having some of that would be some of the pinnacles off of Carmel down in Monterey. We used to run recreational dives to a place we called the Pinnacles, and in some of the deeper parts of that area, there was some hydrocoral, although very small in comparison to Cordell Bank. And also, it's a well-dove area, so it's been looted, as you might say. But that would probably be the closest that I had seen in California to what you might expect at Cordell Bank.

*John Walton:* Similar place – I didn't really get to dive deep – was Arena Rock. Seemed quite similar, but it's a much shallower deal. The other place was, I was fortunate to dive with Dr. Schmieder on Schmieder Bank down at Point Sur, and the pinnacle, Jerry and I went on that. The first dive was pretty amazing, very similar to Cordell Bank. Huge hydrocorals, huge fans, sponges. Similar depth, similar visibility. Not the life of rockfish and juveniles, but just the invertebrate life was amazing. Very similar to Cordell Bank.

Also, on the ascent in Cordell Bank, I was really amazed with the life in the – I guess you'd call it pelagic life, the salps and the ctenophores and the jellyfish, cnidarians, that would come floating by you when you're on the line. Just amazing, beautiful, like creatures from another planet. The ctenophores with the colors, and the salp that would be 20, 30 feet long, these huge chains would float by you. Just beautiful.

One of the dives I really remember was one of the deeper dives – Jerry and I dropped down to the sediment. When I hit the bottom, the bottom was crawling, and it was – brittle stars were just – I mean, the bottom was alive. And when you're narced, at that depth, to see that, it's kinda hard to get a grasp of what you're looking at. Thousands of little arms sticking up outta holes in the bottom. That was really something. I'll never forget that.

*Jerry Seawell:* Like John was saying, when we were decompressing on the T-bar, like he said, you'd see all this marine life drift by, and so it was giving you something to look at and do while you're waiting for your time to come up. So it helped pass the time.

Other times, we saw sunfish out there swimming in the distance. And one time particularly, a dive where Dave Walls and I were decompressing, we had about a five- or six-foot blue shark swim around us, and he kept circling us. And you could see his eye going up and down, left and right, and I think he was checking Dave out there. He's looking at him like a stuffed turkey with little ends on the feet there. But like John was saying, the marine life you would see drift by was worth the dive itself. Helped pass the time.

*Dave Walls:*

Yeah, it was kinda interesting. I know the first few times that I saw sunfish out in the distance, I was absolutely sure it was a shark, judging from the distance. But it was interesting, on the dive that Jerry and I did, when we spotted this shark swimming around us – or he said, yeah, the neat thing about the blue with the white around the eye, you could see the eye moving up and down. I actually thought to myself, “Well, he's gonna think that he's not that hungry,” when he was watching me.

And didn't we discover later on – Jerry was filming all of this, and discovered later on that, actually, you spotted on the film that he was there during our descent as well, so he may have been following us through the entire dive, and we weren't aware of it; I'm glad. Yeah.

*Dewey Livingston:*

Was there a real danger with sharks, with the blue shark, for instance?

*Dave Walls:*

I don't know. I never had a feeling that I was in danger. They seemed curious, but I never sensed that they were aggressive. I don't know that I was ever really fearful when we were under.

*Dave Cassotta:*

I would agree with Dave Walls. I think for most of us, we'd all grown up with the Jacques Cousteau series [30:00] on television and seen them with a variety of different sharks. And then our experience as divers, the blue sharks were really not man-eaters or known for shark attacks.

And in fact, when John was talking about the time when he was sitting on the gunwale, waiting to go in, and the blue sharks went by, well, he asked John and I think it was Jerry, “Are you up to diving today?” But then he said – someone else said, “Oh, there's sharks in the water.” And then Steve and I and Dave were getting our gear ready for our turn, and we said, “Well, what species?” And they said, “Blues.” “Oh, okay. No problem.” So we weren't worried about that, and when we got in the water, on that particular day, they went away. But yeah, when they're around, they really weren't that interested, but it was the other specie that we were really concerned about.

*Dewey Livingston:*

Any sighting?

*Dave Cassotta:* We saw great whites on a – was that a survey? Yeah, John was there, and a friend of ours was there, too, taking pictures. He got some really good pictures, so you should talk to John about that one.

*Jennifer Stock:* That was at Cordell Bank?

*Dave Cassotta:* Yeah. I don't know if it was at the bank or on the way out. Here, I'll pass it over to John.

*John Walton:* I don't remember the year, but we had done a survey trip out of Bodega Bay, and Bob had chartered a boat, a fishing boat, to go out and do – back then it was Loran C, but we didn't have satellite.

So we went out and did the survey, and on the way back we saw a very large triangular fin. We were probably halfway back from the bank to Bodega. A big three-foot fin sticking up outta the water. So we swung over the boat to it, and it was about a 15-foot white shark that was basking. I don't know if he'd just eaten, but he was just underneath the surface and really didn't care much about our boat. We got right up to it. The boat actually bumped it, and he kinda gave a big swish with his tail and moved off. But it was a very intimidating fish. It was a big fish.

I was lucky enough to see a white shark eating a dead gray whale in Monterey Bay in '87. It was a different – with Greg Remick. And we saw this shark come up and eat this whale. This is not the Cordell Bank, but I wish I had had a video camera. We watched it for about an hour, eating this whale.

We called the Coast Guard because it was floating in to the Cannery Row area. They came out and grapple-hooked it, and when they got there, there were two sharks: one 15- and one 20-foot shark eating this whale. It was pretty spectacular – I have a picture at home. Not Cordell Bank. Different story. *[Laughter]* But we did see one on the way back from Cordell.

*Jerry Seawell:* There's a couple dives where we saw multiple sightings of blues, but they were smaller, juvenile size. And I know some of the safety divers were a little apprehensive to go in and retrieve some of the gear. They had their – voiced their concerns. But we reassured 'em that those are just blues, don't worry about it. But they were a little worried.