

*Schmieder:*

First of all, when I went into the water I had an instant rush of realization, “I am in scuba gear getting ready to go down on Cordell Bank.” And I think you can appreciate after a year – more than a year, of preparation, talking strategy and so on, the act of actual doing this was what people must feel when – when the astronauts get into a rocket and this thing finally takes off after years, maybe a decade, of preparation.

And I had that rush as I went into the water, and as I sort of got oriented and got to the line. I said, “Holy cow, this is actually going to happen here.”

There was not so much current on the surface, everything seemed favorable and I was just very cognizant that, “This moment is happening now,” whatever that means.

So I started down the line with Larry. And I think we sort of took turns going down the line. I was ahead, he was ahead. And surprisingly soon I started seeing what I assumed was the bottom. It was sort of this greenish gray opaque cover below me.

And I thought, “How cow, we’ve done all this and we are at the bottom and it’s only 60 feet down and it’s mud. And that’s all there is. Darn it,” or some thought words like that.

So we continued down and as I went down, this gray green blanket started getting texture and a mottled appearance, and then I realized it was shimmering. And then, only then, did I realize I was looking at fish. Somehow I had not been prepared. I had not thought about seeing rockfish. I was used to thinking there are gonna be rockfish, like, lingcod on the bottom.

But I had not actually seen in my previous diving a solid opaque blanket of rockfish. And so I was unprepared to even recognize it. It didn’t occur to me these were fish until we got close enough to see here they are shimmering.

And as I approached them I probably was only six feet away or so, maybe even less than that, they started slowly parting, as fish do.

They moved very gently and slowly, but of course, you can't come close to them, they know how to keep their distance.

And if you can imagine having an opaque curtain in front of you and then a small hole opens and it widens like an iris, and as that iris opened I saw below me this extraordinarily colorful, exquisitely beautiful, astonishingly bright landscape below me with these colors pink, especially, white, especially, but maybe some other purplish colors.

It was not gray. It was not maybe the fluorescent plastic colors that you see on, you know, traffic markers. It wasn't that bright. But the combination of seeing colors of any kind, and also my mental state, and also probably starting to get a little bit of nitrogen narcosis, which enhances your perception, to me at that time was an astonishing, overwhelming visual experience.

And I had another moment of realization. At that moment, just when I saw that, it was – the moment was, “Holy smokes, I am here, I've seen it. No matter what else I do in my life. I have seen Cordell Bank and I'm the first human to do so.” That's what I thought about.

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And then I had to stop and I just hovered looking at this, looking down at it maybe 30 feet below me, 40 feet. It couldn't have been much more than that. I just hovered there for a while and looked around and looked at sort of the geometry, the pattern of the colors.

I tried to sort of not look at details. I wanted to see sort of the pattern and I was looking around to see this quarter mile wide so called big flat area where we could wander around, which I knew by that time probably was not there.

All I could see was this very narrow ridge below me, and it trailed off into invisible dark depths off to the edges. My peripheral vision at the limit of visibility it was probably 80 feet or 90 feet or so. And it would go out of focus at the limit of that visibility, but everything inside of that was like a jigsaw puzzle of colored pieces.

And that's when I knew that I had been to the proverbial symbolic mountaintop. This had to be the same experience that Hillary had when he stood on the top of Everest, knowing at that moment you have just done it. And anything after this can never change the fact that you've done it. We succeeded, we are here.