



**THE SALEM EXPRESS**

JENNY LORD ASKS IF WE SHOULD BE DIVING WRECKS SUCH AS THIS

**Q&A: RICHARD HARRIS**

WE CHAT TO THE RENOWNED CAVE AND TECHNICAL DIVER

**TECH: FROM REC TO TECH**

YANA STASHKEVICH URGES DIVERS TO CHALLENGE THEIR LIMITS, NOT LIMIT THEIR CHALLENGES

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## Exploring JAWAKARA



Stuart Philpott visits one of the **Maldives' newest resorts** and discovers why the **Jawakara islands** will quickly become a diver hotspot

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# BEYOND TECHNICAL

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**T**here was never a question of if, but more of when and how I would start diving. Growing up watching the Jacques Cousteau Odyssey instead of cartoons or kids programmes definitely had something to do with it. As did an unofficial 'trydive' at the age of six that got me hooked onto diving from that very first underwater breath.

This year is exactly ten years since I excitedly picked up my PADI Open Water card from a tiny dive shop in Barbados. Within a few months I had bought all my kit, and my collection of shiny cards grew considerably, covering most of PADI's specialities. All of which were completed in 25 degree C water with 30 metre visibility and perfect conditions. Well, apart from the Navigation speciality and Rescue Diver, which I did in a very cold Wraysbury, with visibility resembling a strong cup of Turkish coffee.

Over the next few years, and with as many qualifications as I could carry, I then embarked on a solo mission of ticking off recreational bucket list dives across the oceans of the Caribbean, Indian, Mediterranean, Atlantic and Pacific, sacrificing all of my holiday allowances and extending any business trip I could. I learned a valuable lesson along the way - never allow the fact that you don't have a regular dive buddy stop you from diving. While a dive/travel companion can provide you a sense of security, unless you share the same goals it also might hinder rather than propel your progress, and potentially even your ability to be 'in the moment'.

## The plateau

Diving to the level of your qualifications without further training doesn't necessarily equate to wasting time or mean that you aren't developing as a diver. It exposes you to a range of diving conditions and environments and allows you to learn what truly excites you underwater. However, while 350 dives across three continents over five years confirmed my obsession with wrecks and big fish, it not only left a significant dent in my finances, but it also made me feel restless wanting new challenges. I reached a plateau, and I didn't know what I wanted to throw myself into next.

They say always start with the end in mind – but there are so many ends to consider! Dark alluring Scandinavian mines, mystical Mexican cenotes, deep wrecks in Sri Lanka and Vanuatu, Emergence du Ressel, Britannic, Great Lakes and Maltese deep wrecks to name just a few.

Should I start with open circuit and then switch to a rebreather? Should I buy a rebreather? Should I start my cave and mine training on open circuit or on a rebreather? Being stuck in an indecision limbo felt worse than diving in the lakes and lochs of Britain in a wetsuit in December.

In 2019, when I saw an article about Scapa Flow's 100- ▶





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# CHALLENGE YOUR LIMITS

## DON'T LIMIT YOUR CHALLENGES

Yana Stashkevich seeks to provide inspiration for all, as she recounts her journey from PADI Open Water to technical CCR and cave diving, explaining her mindset - and lessons learned - along the way

Photographs by Yana Stashkevich

“ Breaking one's self to explore the limit of your ability to keep going under controlled circumstances under a good mentorship is a journey that is always neglected but necessary ”

*Phil Short, explorer*



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year anniversary, I sprang into action. I found a last-minute spot on a boat and arranged for someone in Orkney, whom I vaguely knew, to be my dive buddy for three days. Thirty-two hours and 700 miles later I found myself on a dive boat surrounded by countless stages, rebreathers, twinsets and slightly intimidating and mildly bemused technical divers. There I was with a single 15-litre cylinder, a leaking drysuit that was too tight for sufficiently warm underlayers, 3mm gloves instead of a dryglove system and a completely useless SMB for cold water.

Diving SMS Markgraf (44m) on a single cylinder with only five minutes of bottom time was enough for me to make that leap to technical diving. Before my surface interval was over, I had already booked the full Tech 50 course in Malta, and with the lure of a big discount, had signed up to do the Divemaster course at the same time.

**Starting tech training**

I was thrilled to explore the Um El Faroud, MV Karwela, MV Imperial Eagle, and other iconic wrecks of Malta. But along with that came the irrational fear of racking up deco and not being able to come up to the surface straight away if I needed to.

The inherent calculated risk associated with technical diving has never faded me, but once I had passed my course and no longer had an instructor with me on every dive, that changed. I found myself cutting my dives short and pretty much doing recreational dives while carrying twinset and stages. Despite always being in control of my emotions and

very level-headed, now I had some kind of strange block that was pushing me back into my familiar comfort zone, which I was trying to escape.

On the surface, I was excitedly planning each dive and was eager to explore. However as soon as I was at 50m and deco reached ten minutes, I wanted to return to the surface. My imagination would start creating vivid scenarios of disastrous things that could go wrong. I kept running through my check list of potential responses in my head but couldn't shake this anxiety and enjoy the dive. I was perfectly in control physically and mentally, but if I said I was having fun, I would be lying.

I wish I had followed this fitting advice a long time ago, and not just in relation to diving. When you find yourself overthinking, try to identify the root cause of your concerns by asking yourself why? five times. Talk to others about it. Figure it out. ▶



“ Stop planning the ‘what ifs’. Plan for it to go right ”

*Sally Cartwright, technical diver and an early CCR adopter*



### Going underground

Keen to enjoy diving again, I decided to take a diversion from the course I was on, and here I was in Holme Bank ready to start a mine diving course. The thought of a physical ceiling instead of a hypothetical one due to deco obligations was very appealing and made me feel relaxed.

Little did I know at the time that I would be joining the Nordic Explorers team just over a year later. I found myself on a Veggfjellan expedition setting up kit over a kilometre inside a frozen cave inside the fjord by the Arctic Circle and spending ten hours a day with cave diving and exploration legends, including Sami Paakkariinen, Laura Tuominen, Ben Reymenants, Laura Tuominen, Jenni Westerlund and Ian France, to name a few.

### Failing to resist the call of the silent world

In March 2022, driving to the GO Diving Show on a Saturday morning (an event that has become an immovable object in my annual calendar), I was ready to re-immense myself back into the world of diving (quite literally) after a surreal and wasteful two years of COVID restrictions and lockdowns.

I knew that for the deep dives I really wanted to do, owning a CCR was non-negotiable. I armed myself with a presentation schedule, a list of key people I wanted to speak to, and a mission to decide on the CCR unit I was going to buy in 2025. Why 2025? A completely random date I had chosen that seemed far enough in the future not to worry about, but close enough to start building the excitement of the world owning a CCR would unlock. So naturally, after endless research and conversations, by Sunday I was the proud owner of a new shiny JJ-CCR... with a course booked.

And the JJ has definitely been used extensively on multiple expeditions and adventures ever since.

### Reflections

Why do I dive? For me, it's not just about constantly learning and pushing myself. It's about those moments and stories you can share that are not easy to come by. A reef conservation project in the Seychelles. Diving the historic Rainbow Warrior and HMNZS Waikato wrecks in New Zealand. A mesmerizing halocline in the Mexican cenotes. A perfectly preserved wrecks of the Aegean Sea. Sunfish and hammerhead shark encounters. These moments have brought a purpose to my diving.



Yana exploring underground



Diving a plane wreck in Greece

What do you want to experience? What is meaningful for you? Dream big. If anything was possible and you couldn't fail, where would you want to be? From that vision, work backwards and create a clear efficient plan of how to get there, but be prepared to be flexible. Chase these moments and experiences.

When it comes to inspiration, don't always try to find a role model - be inspired by projects, by locations, by opportunities, possibilities. Don't wait for someone to 'introduce you' to diving, technical diving, CCR diving, whatever it might be. Go out there, find out who does it, talk to the right people and do it.

### Final thoughts

- Always be ready. If the opportunity presented itself tomorrow - could you take it? Are you physically and mentally ready?
  - Don't assume an opportunity will be presented to you again. Just go for it.
  - Focus on what you can control. Always. No excuses. Often, the only things you can control are your emotions, your mindset, your attitude to the situation. This is powerful. Don't underestimate it.
  - If you think you can or if you think you cannot - you are right either way. You set your limits yourself.
- Don't limit yourself. Safe and fun diving everyone. ■



Norway dive team