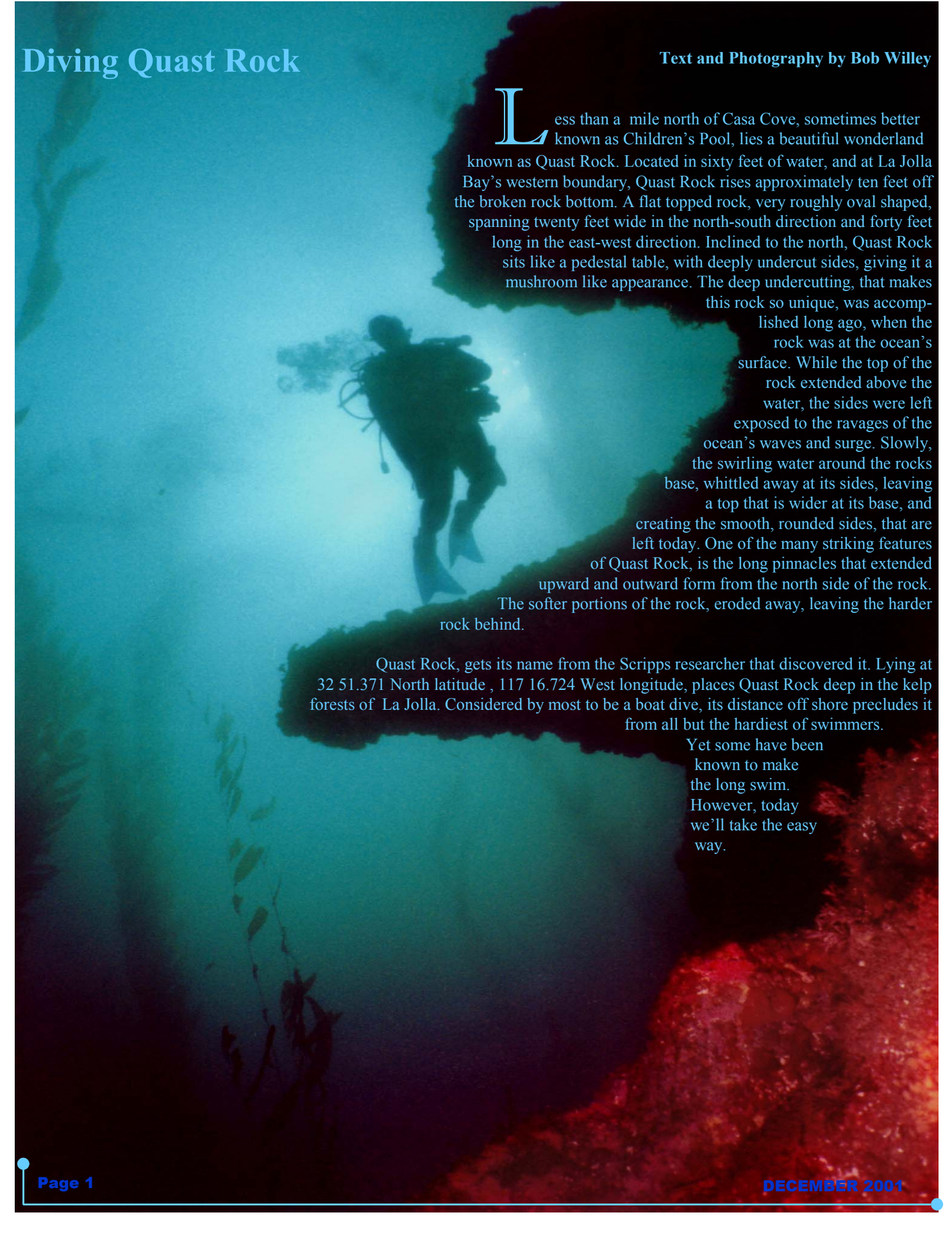


Diving Quast Rock

Text and Photography by Bob Willey



Less than a mile north of Casa Cove, sometimes better known as Children's Pool, lies a beautiful wonderland known as Quast Rock. Located in sixty feet of water, and at La Jolla Bay's western boundary, Quast Rock rises approximately ten feet off the broken rock bottom. A flat topped rock, very roughly oval shaped, spanning twenty feet wide in the north-south direction and forty feet long in the east-west direction. Inclined to the north, Quast Rock sits like a pedestal table, with deeply undercut sides, giving it a mushroom like appearance. The deep undercutting, that makes this rock so unique, was accomplished long ago, when the rock was at the ocean's surface. While the top of the rock extended above the water, the sides were left exposed to the ravages of the ocean's waves and surge. Slowly, the swirling water around the rocks base, whittled away at its sides, leaving a top that is wider at its base, and creating the smooth, rounded sides, that are left today. One of the many striking features of Quast Rock, is the long pinnacles that extended upward and outward from the north side of the rock. The softer portions of the rock, eroded away, leaving the harder rock behind.

Quast Rock, gets its name from the Scripps researcher that discovered it. Lying at 32 51.371 North latitude , 117 16.724 West longitude, places Quast Rock deep in the kelp forests of La Jolla. Considered by most to be a boat dive, its distance off shore precludes it from all but the hardest of swimmers.

Yet some have been known to make the long swim. However, today we'll take the easy way.

With a gorgeous clear blue sky, we headed out Mission Bay channel, aboard the new boat in town, the Extremis. Aboard her today were two new Bottom Bunch members, Jeff Hannigan,

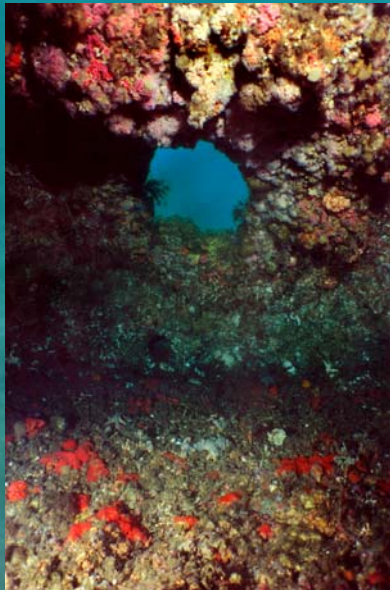


Tall kelp and colorful gorgonians abound at Quast Rock.

Faith Ortins, along with Jackie Willey and myself. Recently taking up residence here from Beverly, Massachusetts, Faith and Jeff are both extremely experienced divers. Much of their diving was done on wrecks in the unpredictable waters of the Atlantic. Jeff, a boat owner for many years began looking at the short comings of boats that were used for diving. After years of research he felt it was time to put all his information together and build a boat to his specifications. Purchasing a thirty-five foot commercial fishing boat hull, Jeff proceeded to build his vision, the Extremis is the result. After taking a promotional position with DUI, Faith and Jeff packed up their dive gear and their dive boat and headed for San Diego.

Turning the Extremis north we paralleled the coastline from Mission Bay to La Jolla. The ocean was as calm as a lake. Masses of golden brown kelp floated idly

below. The turquoise blue water surrounding the golden leaves of kelp, almost appeared to glow in the bright Sun. With the coordinates input into the Global Positioning System computer, our course was guided from unseen satellites high above. Turning gently to the east we began our turn into La Jolla Bay.



The underside of Quast Rock, peering upward through Quast hole.

Passing slowly through the floating kelp, we closed in on our destination, Quast Rock. With the Sun low, to the south in this November sky, created a back lit silhouette



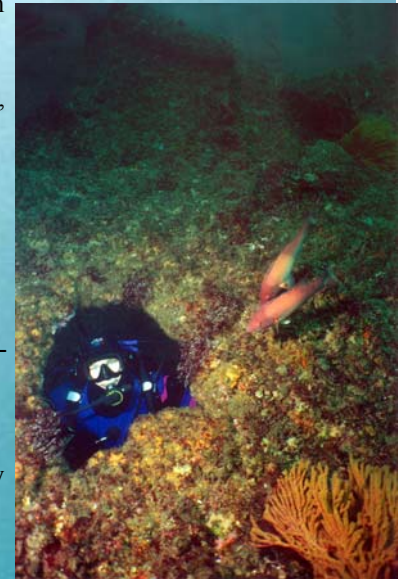
Faith Ortins passes under the sculptured rock that makes up Quast Rock. Light through Quast hole can be seen right of center.

still, with no current, at the surface. The anticipation of a great dive ahead, began to build, as I looked down, deep into the kelp forest



Faith Ortins exploring the north side of Quast

ette of the familiar buildings and dive sites that our club has dove so regularly. South was Casa Cove, the sea wall and the people standing on it were easily visible.



A couple of the local residence check out a

Around the corner to the right was South Casa, Wipeout and Hospital Point. Moving east was Alligator Head and into La Jolla Cove. Due east was La Jolla Shores. As we glided slowly, through the kelp canopy, arriving at our prescribed destination, Jeff's eyes were on the sonar display of the bottom finder, that continually displayed the contour of the ocean bottom beneath the Extremis. Sixty feet to the bottom, varying slightly with the varying height of rocks and boulders that lay beneath us. Kelp and



Zoanthid anemones colonizing on a Red gorgonian.

fish appeared as undefined patches of gray on the display. Suddenly the

contour of the bottom jumped straight up, like a step on the display, we had arrived. Dropping anchor, we prepared to enter the water.

With a crash and a storm of swirling bubbles, I back rolled from the Extremis into the blue water below. Adjusting my mask



Gorgonian fans can be found all around and on top of the rock.

and regulator I began my descent. Swimming north toward the anchor line, I began to slowly descend, riding high through the kelp forest, I meandering lazily through the Giant kelp, that arched gently toward the surface, the bottom now forty feet below. The ocean floor was still only barely discernable, with only light colors making their way to my eyes. As I continued northward and downward the shape of something large began to materialize from the mist. Like a great ship, slowly appearing out of the fog, the sculptured, water worn shape of Quast Rock began to appear.

Touching



Jackie Willey peeks out from the underside of a seemingly almost impossibly long overhang at the west end of Quast Rock.



Divers over the alien landscape of Quast Rock. Light passing through Quast hole can be just be seen in the darkness, far left of

ming together, darting about, playing above and around the rock. As we drew closer, they took one pass over us and were gone, disappearing between the silhouettes of kelp, rising in the distance.

Passing weightlessly over the top of Quast rock, I looking down upon the myriad of golden gorgonian fans, swaying in unison with the ocean's surge. The top of Quast rock lay inclined to the north, with its outer edge turned slightly upward, like

down on the bottom, to the south of Quast Rock, Jackie and I had been the first to arrive. Several Harbor seals could be seen in the distance, swim-

the raised edge of a serving tray. Patches of red, orange and yellow sponges added splashes of color. Orange Puff Ball sponges lay across the sculptured rock, some huddling in groups of two to three, looking like a child's game of marbles



Jeff Hannigan explores the multitudes of colorful life on the north side of Quast Rock.

in mid play. Toward the middle of Quast Rock is a hole that is perhaps two feet across, that leads down into a shallow undercut cavern. Light from the water north of Quast Rock could be seen through what has become to be known as Quast's Hole.

Passing over and descending below Quast's upturned edge, revealed that the entire rock is supported by a deeply undercut base. Its top overhanging its base by between six to ten feet, with the exception of a few places were it was substan-



Deeply undercut rock sides give the appear-



Clouds of silvery bait fish swirl over the contour of Quast Rock.

tially more. Long fingers of rock protruded outward from the top of Quast Rocks perimeter, rising like pinnacles, reaching upward and outward, seeming to

radiate away from the rocks center.

Swimming beneath the overhanging rock, gives one an impression of exploring an undersea cavern. Everywhere over the rocks surface was found vast populations of colorful Strawberry anemones growing in pillowy tufts of bright colors, ranging from red, orange, pink and lavender. Brightly colored sponges added to the color and texture of the rocks walls.



Faith Ortins glide weightlessly over the pinnacles of Quast rock, with the sun in the background.

Looking up from below, seeing the silhouette of Quast's dark shape against the bright blue water, with the Sun in the background gave an impression of an alien world. The dark silhouette of pinnacles reaching upward, seen through a light vale of haze, that made the rays of sunlight visible as they passed through the water, made for a beautiful, yet ominous scene.



Jackie Willey beneath the Strawberry anemone covered rock of the highest overhang of Quast Rock.

One of the most beautiful views that I have ever seen

underwater, and one I never tire of, is the view of looking out from under a rock overhang, with its beautiful color and texture, into the blue water and kelp forest beyond. The three dimensional feeling, of having such a prominent and contrasty foreground, along with a peaceful and serene background, gives the impression of incredible depth. With the kelp forest swaying lazily in unison in the background, makes you realize this is paradise. And the spectacular views never seem to quit here at Quast Rock.

To the north of Quast Rock the bottom drops away into deeper water. The slope, stair stepping its way down into the deeper water be-

low, is strewn with rocks and boulders. Down among some of these rocks I came across several beautiful examples of zoanthid anemones colonizing on a Golden gorgonian fan. Its bright yellow color along of its large polyps, made for a gorgeous sight, one that is definitely worth spending a little time. This anemone seems to co-exist with host gorgonian fans, taking over a branch or two. The contrasting colors were striking. Each zoanthid polyps were many times the size of the usual gorgonian polyps, allowing easy viewing of its incredible detail.



Sheepshead, Spotted sea bass, Sargo, Opal-eye, Senorita fish, Blacksmith, mackerel and Garibaldi are some of the many fish found at Quast rock.

After an hour, and completing a few passes it was time return. Swimming south we began a slow ascent, making our way through the kelp.

The Sun now over in the west was sending its rays of light streaming through the kelp forest at a low angle. Bright shafts of light danced lazily through the kelp canopy above.



The top of Quast Rock, covered in gorgonian fans, Strawberry anemones and colorful sponges.

This dive was a real surprise. Quast Rock offers a lot in a relatively small area. Beautiful structure, with a wide variety of fish life, gorgonians and sponges galore, and not to forget the Giant kelp. Quast rock a dive site not to be missed.



The west side of Quast Rock looking east.

Bob Willey

