Ocean Sports Journal

Ricky Grigg
Grigg's Accomplishments

Education
1958 - Bachelor of Arts, Stanford University
1963 - Master of Science, University of Hawaii (Marine Zoology)
1970 - Ph.D., Scripps Institute of Oceanography

Experience
1961-62 - Math and Science teacher, Punahou School
1965-66 - Aquanaut, Sealab II, Office of Naval Research Special Projects Office
1984-Present - Marine Biological Laboratory, University of Hawaii

Notable Published Works

Activities and Awards
1965 - Mentorship Public Service Award presented for Sealab II
1966 - Konner, Duke Kahanamoku International Surfing Championships, Sunset Beach, Hawaii
1987 - Kanaka O' Ke Kai Ocean Recognition Award (for research on underwater evolution)

Studying the ocean has made life all worthwhile for Grigg

University of Hawaii oceanographer Richard "Ricky" Grigg describes himself as "just an average person," but the former aquanaut is anything but. Just mention his name to any ocean sports enthusiast, and you'll find that he's one of the most highly respected members of the ocean sports community.

Grigg, 52, considers such compliments an integral part of his reasons for living. He feels being an inspiration to others as the ultimate purpose in his life. That, and his two daughters.

Ocean is Grigg's love of life

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It was in the early '60s that Grigg, hard-pressed to decide whether to enter medical school or marine biology, decided to go to Hawaii for a couple of years of diving and surfing to try to get a handle on his life. A few months later he ended up in Tahiti, where he met a pearl diver. He became hooked on diving. He started out at 20-foot depths and in three months was diving to 120 feet. That three-month experience not only left him eager, but helped him decide on graduate studies in marine biology (1960). It took him almost four years to get his degree.

"That must be some kind of record, but I then I knew that I wanted to go to Scripps (La Jolla, Calif.) and get my Ph.D. I really buckled down and worked, yet still came to Hawaii and surfed," Grigg said.

While at Scripps, the Navy conducted Sealab II, off the institute's deep water trench. Grigg applied and got picked because he had a research proposal they liked.

Sealab II was equipped with lights and generators. They took it to the 200-foot trench edge, although the trench goes much deeper. Grigg's proposal pointed out that lights and sound (from the generators) and the flat ocean bottom had all the elements of an artificial reef, which was known to attract fish.

"We were going to take these three factors and to see to what extent I could change the marine life," Grigg said. "It turned out it attracted about 45,000 different species of fish before the experiment was over from about a couple hundred fish normally."

Grigg was one of only three civilians chosen; the rest were from the Navy. Astronaut Scott Carpenter had been chosen not only for space, but to train the Sealab program, which was an inner space. The idea was to turn the nation's attention from space to the earth, where problems of resource limitations and the environment were mounting.

"We were guinea pigs. We lost a man and the project was terminated. What we found was that there's better ways to do it -- submersibles and robots," Grigg said. "It's interesting that we're now discovering the same thing in outer space that we did in the ocean 20 years ago."

After the Sealab, Grigg went back to Scripps, got his doctorate degree and came back to Hawaii. He's been here ever since, teaching and doing research in oceanography at UH. He says he enjoys going over the weather charts and predicting the surf, then going out and checking the ocean to verify theories.

"That's such a thrilling thing -- to have that mass of information to go over; it's really a fabulous opportunity. An average day does not exist."