Delcambre diver discovers natural beauty under the sea

By David Williams
Staff Writer

DELCAMBRE — Doyle Dooley never has been one to be afraid of water.

As a 16-year-old in the early 1960s, Dooley's underwater fascination was piqued weekly in the Lloyd Bridges underwater adventure television series, Sea Hunt.

At 46, Dooley has been an accomplished scuba diver for about 14 years.

When Dooley can take time off from his Delcambre-based air conditioning business, generally he's under 30 to 180 feet of water in the Gulf of Mexico or the Caribbean Sea spearfishing and taking photographs.

His interest in underwater photography grew out of prohibitive laws against shooting fish inside Caribbean coral formations.

"They've declared many of those areas down there underwater natural forests, and you cannot shoot the fish. So, I thought I have to do something other than just swim around and that's how I began taking pictures," Dooley says.

Dooley describes underwater activities around offshore Louisiana waters as being "as good a place to dive as any place in the world."

"The fishing is great — red snapper, lemon fish, groupers — and the continental shelf follows Louisiana, so you don't have to go too far out to dive in a good area," Dooley says.

"I don't find diving dangerous, even though some do. I have confidence in my equipment, and once you know how to operate it properly, everything is fine," he says.

Dooley concedes to having two close calls.

A 7-foot shark once appeared after Dooley speared a red snapper and in about 40 feet of water near a Gulf of Mexico oil platform.

"The shark came in and just swam around me about 120 feet away. Sharks don't usually zoom in and just hit you -- they like to scope out what they're getting involved with," Dooley said.

"The shark then came at me and I just shoved my spear at his nose which is a very sensitive area," he added.

The shark became disoriented and swam away, presumably following the blood scent from the wounded snapper, Dooley says.

The other instance occurred while diving in about 180 feet of water and nearly using up his air supply.

On the way up he stopped to spear a 25-pound jack crevalle about 40 feet from the surface. While tangleing with his catch, Dooley realized his air supply was nearly exhausted.

"Right as we got to the surface I ran completely out of air," Dooley says.

He and a friend had been diving around the 100-foot depths in search of groupers.

Dooley says they began their ascent to the surface after both began feeling euphoric -- an effect that commonly occurs during deep dives.

"This can be very dangerous because high pressures can affect your blood-nitrogen levels to a point that you lose all sense of direction including which way is up," he says.

"A lot of divers have gotten this water disease so bad they actually began swimming into deeper water thinking they were moving toward the surface," Dooley says.

Scuba diving is very popular today, although Dooley feels about 50 percent of people who enter the sport eventually hang up their gear.

"A little of this is fear," he said. "Some find that it's really scary down there. But I'd say many give it up because it's a lot of money to spend on equipment only to go under twice or three times a year."

"Diving isn't nearly so dangerous anymore because the equipment is well made today," he added. "The equipment is so good that when you're diving sometimes you forget to do the little things like blow your ears out, or routines you need to perform that were taught to you in diving class."

Dooley says he's spent about $3,000 invested in his diving hobby, which includes numerous air tanks, vests and a $500 underwater camera with light and strobe accessories.

His son, Doyle Jr., and wife Ann, many times now accompany him on his underwater treks into the Gulf of Mexico or the Caribbean.

Becoming involved in the sport simply involves visiting what Dooley terms as a "reputable dive shop" and taking lessons.

"It all depends what you want to do with diving as far as expenses," he says.

Following six weeks of pool and book work the final steps are several required "open water dives."

Dooley says going out with first time divers can be rather interesting for everyone.

"Especially when all these new divers are packing spear guns."