



# Anchoring tips

## AN UNDERWATER PERSPECTIVE

US scuba diver and skipper Lada Simek shares some hard-earned advice

Vyv Cox

**D**rifting in a hot air balloon over variable terrain and needing to drop an anchor, you'd surely try to select a good spot. When anchoring boats, however, many people casually throw 100lb worth of ground tackle overboard and hope for the best – that it will hold fast and come up again later.

If you have a depth/fish finder you should play it smart and select your spot so as to maximise your odds of getting your anchor gear back again.

As a scuba instructor I anchor several times a day. Typically, I begin my dive by descending along the rode to check how the anchor is sitting. The situations I have seen would amaze you!

### Stuck in a hole

I had to dive to free my own anchor. It was stuck in a hole in such a weird fashion that to get it out I had to grab the stock, turn it sideways, rotate it 45° and pull it out backwards. Would it have come out

**ABOVE** Successful anchoring depends almost entirely on what the seabed is like **RIGHT** "Nice concept, but is the industry ready for a Swiss Army Anchor?"



pulling from the surface? Never! (Parsonage Point, Rye N.Y.)

### Stuck in a wreck

The skipper of a dive boat off New Jersey dropped a grappling hook on a wreck in 80ft of water. There was an iron ring on the bow of the wreck about 18in diameter. The grappling hook went right through it

with one inch to spare. It might have come out after several weeks trying. (Point Pleasant, N.J.)

### Stuck in a buoy

I laughed underwater when I pictured the dismay of the poor boater involved. The tips of his Danforth went through two separate links of a massive abandoned

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**RIGHT** The ultra anchor has no indentations to prevent catching rock or weed  
**BELOW** PBO contributor Rupert Holmes's anchor snagged this giant ball of rope and a discarded 40kg anchor



If your anchor is lost you can always call a dive shop and ask them to retrieve it

Kass Schmitt



Use your depth finder to assess the seabed before anchoring

buoy chain over 100ft long and many tons in weight. "Ethel, the anchor ain't stuck, I can lift it OK but it keeps getting heavier!" (Captain's Island, Greenwich CT)

### Oops. Not stuck at all

There are times when anchors don't hold at all and still get lost. While diving over a flat, sandy bottom I found a clean, brand new white rope. Following it in one direction I came to a brand-new Danforth anchor, not stuck or even buried, just lying on the bottom. Following the line in the opposite direction for 100ft I found a cleanly cut unbroken factory end. "No! No! Harry, you gotta tie off the other end!" (Glen Cove, Long Island N.Y.)

### Use your depth finder

If you have a depth finder, use it. If you are anchoring in a flat bottom, it is probably sand or mud. Chapman's rule is fine. The greater the scope the better your anchor holds. There is a problem doing that in rocky areas, especially those having large

boulders. A lot of scope is good on a sandy or muddy bottom because the anchor must bury itself. Among rock there is no burying and a large scope is not necessary, but you never have the security. I once spent three hours securely anchored on a windy day. When I checked my anchor I found that it was on a flat, solid rock, one tip having caught a half inch ledge. Even though it held, it probably would not have stayed there if the wind had shifted.

Rocks in the north-east of the US have been deposited largely by glaciers. On land the holes fill with soil, becoming rocky hills. Underwater this does not happen to such an extent. Rocky reefs can have thousands of holes formed by boulders which vary in size from small to as large as a bus. Of the three ways you can lose your anchor, two involve rocks.

### TRAP 1: overhangs

Where two boulders touch, they make a 'V' in which rope can be jammed. In

addition, as they sit on the bottom, current tends to scour away the sand under the edges, making overhangs.

Crustaceans use these caves to hide out, often excavating them deeper. It is not at all uncommon to have to reach for a lobster so far that your arm is under a rock as far as your shoulder. Try to picture an anchor line running under a boulder while you are above, pulling straight up. The anchor will be pulled horizontally – something which it is specifically designed not to do!

Picture many large boulders close together, a lot of scope and a boat that is swinging by the wind and you will understand why boaters lose ground tackle. At one time I had a pile of anchors in my basement about four feet high. That adds up to a good amount of money lost. String of lobster pots suffer from the same fate as anchors. I find abandoned line and lobster pots on nearly every dive. Use your depth finder and avoid areas with large boulders. ➔

Lester McCarthy/Yachting Monthly



Carefully choose your spot when anchoring

### TRAP 2: sharp edges and cracks

If the tips of the anchor get inside a deep crack in a large rock, often the only way to get it out is to pull the flukes out backwards. This is something you cannot do from the surface. A trip line would solve the problem but it is an added nuisance and few bother with it. If the anchor catches on a sharp ledge, pulling straight up will not get it out and pulling from the opposite direction is sometimes ineffective because the anchor cannot flip over. Your best bet is a pull sideways with much tugging in several directions.

### TRAP 3: lines and cables

Snagged lines or cables can be very frustrating because they jam between the flukes and the stock and can seldom be shaken out. If you snag a string of lobster pots, usually you can bring the line to the surface and lift it off the anchor. If you

can't, you may have to use a little boat power to make just enough slack. The obvious solution is not to get in the situation in the first place. Do not drop the anchor in between two identical lobster pot buoys because they are obviously connected. For every line that is marked there are 10 abandoned ones, so sooner or later you will catch one. Of the three situations this is the least serious one and the easiest to clear, unless you snag a two-ton piece of chain. Avoid 'CABLE CROSSING' areas like the plague. Not only are those cables massive, they are electrified and puncturing one with your hardware might be interesting.

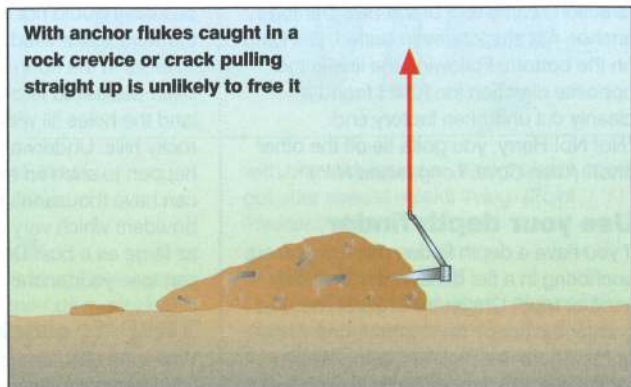
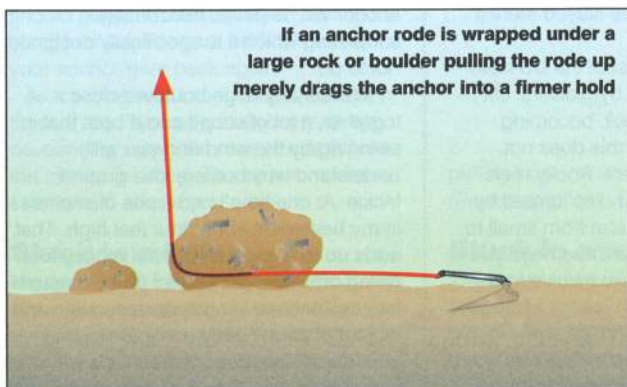
Shipwrecks are even a bigger mess.

Typically, they do not look like a ship but more like a random pile of construction debris with beams, pipes and cables everywhere. Drop a large Danforth on one of those and one out of five times you won't get it back. In such cases use a grappling hook... a cheap one.

If you are anchoring over a rise or mound, drop the anchor so that the wind or current pulls it 'uphill'. Never, never place it so that if it pulls out it will move to deeper water. The reason is obvious. I know somebody who lost his boat that way.

If you are doing serious anchoring, such as overnight, always give the anchor a pull to set it and test it. Going astern at 1,000rpm might do the trick. There are

## 'At one time I had a pile of anchors in my basement about four feet high'



many bottoms which are solid rock with 6in of mud on top. If you give the rode a tug with your hands, it will appear to have a solid bite. It may be fine in a 10-knot wind, but if it should increase to 20 you'll find yourself dragging. Add a lee shore to this scenario and you've got trouble.

One thing is sure. If you have never gotten your anchor stuck, it is only a matter of time until you do. The Mediterranean is littered with ancient anchors – Etruscan, Roman, Phoenician and modern. The old-timers had the same problems we do. When it happens to you, you have five choices:

### Getting free

■ Take as much line in as you can and cut it off, leaving your gear behind. You do have a sharp knife aboard, don't you?

■ Tug the line up and down until you come to the snag. Drive the boat past your anchor and pull from the opposite direction.

■ If this doesn't work, tie off the line to a cleat and pull with the boat in ever widening circles using reasonable power.

■ At this point many will go to the next step, which I do not recommend, of using brute force to rip the anchor out.

Sometimes it works. A 130kg boulder weighs a lot less underwater due to buoyancy and perhaps it may be flipped over but: your anchor may come up



Replica of a 2,000 year old anchor

mangled and useless and you may rip out or weaken the cleat attachment. Since nylon can be stretched about 40% of its length, the line may act like a giant rubber band and you may find the anchor minus its flukes comes flying out of the water with an EXTREMELY DANGEROUS velocity!

■ Let out all your line, tie a float to the end of it. The float can be a plastic bottle



This boat, aptly named *Hold Fast*, was saved by its CQR anchor

Jim Johnston

or your oldest, dirtiest fender. Go home. Look in the yellow pages under DIVING. Call a local dive shop and have them recommend an experienced diver to retrieve your tackle. While he or she is down there, you can have your hull checked, propeller cleaned, the two of you may have a good time doing it all and it should cost much less than new ground tackle.

Finally, if you stop somewhere just to fish and if you have a small boat, why risk an anchor at all? Get a one-gallon plastic pail or a milk bottle with the top cut off, fill it with concrete mix and water, embed a twisted wire coat hanger bent into a loop and let it harden. Remove the plastic, tie it to your anchor line with a piece of clothesline or something that your engine can easily break if it should get stuck.

If you do lose it, it will join the thousands of other chunks of rock on the bottom and will have only cost you a couple of pounds.

If that's too much for you, make yourself a copy of the 2,000-year-old anchor (above left). You'll be the envy of all as you pull into a high-class marina with one of those dangling from your pulpit.

## Nautical limericks

Lada shares some of his limericks inspired by his experiences at sea

*Upon the green ocean we're sailing,  
Our voyage seems far beyond failing,  
But soon you realise  
The Atlantic surprise  
As you're vomiting over the railing!*

*Sailing as a skill is worth knowing,  
Its following is steadily growing,  
It founded this nation  
But as transportation  
You better not care where you're going!*

*My speedboat puts on quite a show  
With the turbos at maximum blow,  
But one of my gauges  
Impacting my wages  
Is the one marked 'empty' and 'low'!*

*My shiny new boat is a honey!  
I use her whenever it's sunny,  
But it sure seems to me,  
When she's placed in the sea,  
A hole forms, into which you throw money!*

*Being seasick is really a curse,  
And nothing can make it reverse,  
You are filled with dismay  
As you hear the captain say,  
"Cheer up! It's gonna get worse!"*

*Taking seas over the bow may be bold,  
But since Northern waters are cold,  
Just notice me wheezing  
Cause my ass – it is freezing  
And the trip's only 10 minutes old!*

*A sailor may find it assuring,  
To be able to sail to his mooring,  
In the harbour, confined  
He's partially blind,  
His vision the sails are obscuring!*

*Docking your vessel while backing,  
Is a skill you shouldn't be lacking.  
When the wind is severe  
You pray you don't hear  
The sound of your fibreglass cracking!*

*The forecast is as nice as can be,  
The weatherman predicts a flat sea.  
He must have been plastered!  
If only that b\*\*\*\*d  
Could see the seas that I see!*

*Underwater rocks are covert,  
Boaters must keep on alert,  
If you don't watch your ass  
They'll eat fibreglass  
And even your prop, for dessert!*

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

A former chemistry teacher, Lada Simek is a parachuting instructor, dive boat operator, wreck researcher, marine educator, Master Scuba Diver Trainer, USCG Master, and



is senior director at Beneath The Sea, the largest nonprofit dive exposition in USA. He writes freelance articles on the marine world. 