

# The Explorers Club

## Northern California Chapter

December 2005 - January 2006

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### Douglas Capone a look at a tiny tough population Planet of the Prokaryotes



Doug Capone is interested in microbial life in the world ocean. His research focuses on the marine microbes in the cycles of nitrogen and carbon, from the fundamental ecology of marine ecosystems and interactions with environmental perturbations.

Prokaryotes\* are the original inhabitants of this planet. They are the toughest of the tough; they hold all the records for living in the coldest, hottest, driest, most acidic and most highly pressurized environments. Also for the longest time! Come learn about these tiny creatures from the man who knows them best and find out how they impact upon our world from an engaging speaker.

Throughout his career, Professor Capone has studied systems as diverse as the coral reefs, mangroves, tropical open ocean, temperate estuaries, groundwater aquifers and Antarctic

Doug's Talk follows the  
Ocean Film Festival  
Reception



snows. He has participated in over thirty major oceanographic expeditions and has served as the chief scientist on over ten.. Dr. Capone is generally acknowledged as one of the leading experts on the marine nitrogen cycle and, in particular, a key process determining the capacity of the tropical oceans to take up atmospheric carbon dioxide. He produced a highly regarded edited volume, *Nitrogen in the Marine Environment* (1983, Academic Press), and he will update that volume in 2006.

Since 1999, Doug Capone has held the Wrigley Chair of Environmental Biology at the University of Southern California.



\* An organism of the kingdom *Monera* (or *Prokaryotae*), comprising the bacteria and cyanobacteria, characterized by the absence of a distinct, membrane-bound nucleus or membrane-bound organelles, and by DNA that is not organized into chromosomes.

Here's a film festival that celebrates the joy, power, and mystery of the sea. Following a successful debut in January 2004, the San Francisco Ocean Film Festival (SFOFF) continues to build on its success, featuring documentaries and narrative works by filmmakers from around the world who want to share their passion for the earth's last frontier.

This unique festival had its premiere January 10 and 11, 2004, at Fort Mason's Cowell Theater with films on saltwater sports, oceanography, coastal culture and more. Hundreds viewed the beauty and mysteries of the ocean's depths, experienced the thrill of ocean sports, explored the coastal cultures that are shaped by the sea, and paused to reflect on the importance of the oceans' vital ecosystems.

The festival is the first of its kind in the United States. Only the *Festival International du Film Maritime et d'Exploration*, a week-long festival in Toulon, France, has been devoted to subject matter from the sea. It has had a strong following for 34 years.

Details for this year's films and reception are at

<http://www.oceanfilmfest.org/>

The Opening Reception will feature seafood, sea chanteys, and wine from Quivira Vineyards; tickets are \$50, and entry may be purchased two ways: 1) Mail your check for \$50/ticket to SFOFF, PO Box 475668, San Francisco, CA 94147 or 2) online via our Acteva box office. (A service charge of \$3.07/ticket will be levied by Acteva.) Tickets will be held at the door

This event may sell out, so purchasing tickets in advance is recommended. The free Explorers Club talk will follow immediately.

#### NEW LOCATION

**Date** Friday, 13 Jan 2006

**Place:** Dolphin Club  
Aquatic Park,  
San Francisco

**Time:** 8:30 pm, lecture  
6:00 SFOFF Reception

**Cost:** Lecture: FREE  
Reception: see SFOFF  
Otherwise: dine before.

Reservation Form on page 5  
Please respond promptly!  
(so we have adequate seating)

[ajviking@aol.com](mailto:ajviking@aol.com)  
or 925 254-3079

# Breaking Trail — the Feminine Way

## Arlene Blum

### San Francisco

Arlene Blum is a dynamic speaker, and she has the breadth of the outdoors to draw upon. Her mountain photography mesmerized an enthusiastic group of explorers at our November 18 meeting. Spinning humour into what many might consider tragic or daunting events throughout her life, she concluded that these experiences developed, in her, an overwhelming tenacity. She finishes what she starts. Sometimes this is extraordinarily challenging.

She contributes much of her success to women role models, for her athletic and academic life has transcended the period when the gentler sex was not welcome to compete. She was part of those women dedicated to proving the fallacy of this position. As a mountaineer her achievements rank with the greatest. She has climbed on all the continents. As a trekker she has strode the length of the Himalayas and the Alps—the latter with a babe in arms.

Her first mountain hike, on Washington's Mount Adams, was completed by sheer will power. As a Midwestern flatlander she knew not what to expect;

she discovered the glory of the heights. When she began to learn the skills of climbing she was limited by the 'fraternity.' To combat this she organized the Denali Damsels (five female climbers which included our Chapter's Dana Isherwood) who topped Alaska's highest peak in 1970. Within a few years she led thirteen women to climb and crest Pakistan's Annapurna.

These are the widely recognized achievements, but there are many more. They include scientific success in showing the dangers of home-present chemicals. Dr. Blum is an expert on RNA. Having now finished her autobiography (*Breaking Trails, A Climber's Life,*) she is returning to the labs.

You can get *Breaking Trails* from her ([www.arleneblum.com](http://www.arleneblum.com)) or through Amazon. A fascinating story; clearly it has resulted in a life well lived—with more to come. She



Sue Estey (left) suggested Arlene's talk and bought a book.  
Chairman Steve Smith and Arlene Blum (below)



has focused upon her goals just as she did that bright day when crossing the knife-edged snow ridge high on Annapurna. Whew, what a picture!



# Saving and Showing Old Photos

## Robert Johnson

### San Francisco

Robert Johnson's passion for photographic art was evident as he proudly showed members of the Explorers Club and the American Society of Media Photographers the new permanent photographic gallery in the spectacular new de Young Museum in Golden Gate Park.

This is the first such gallery established by the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco to display their growing collection of 19th and 20th Century photography. Muybridge studies of

the body in motion, the Golden Gate pre-bridge, olde Chinatown, Weston, Steichen, Brady, pre-and just-after-the-quake from 1906—mentioning but a few—are hung in a shadowed section of the museum to the left when you climb the grand stairs.

On December 9, Curator Johnson spoke lovingly of each picture, many which he collected, many provided by Paul Sack, a museum supporter and ardent photographic collector, who was present. Johnson is justifiably proud of the growing collection and plans to change the gallery about three times each year.

One left the roving lecture with a

heightened appreciation of the depth of content of each picture and an awareness of the emotion and information the images communicate. These are not idle snapshots; they have grown to become works of art.

Check them out. The modern copper-clad de Young beckons.



# A Sunday Morning to Remember Charles Merdinger San Francisco

## The Dolphin Club Our Host on January 13



Chuck Merdinger told us the sweetest air he ever smelled were those breaths at the top of a vertical cableway five decks above, as he followed his sailors exiting the flooding plot room below decks. He bunk room had been blown away. He had spent seven hours in what had become a communications center during the Japanese attack; his ship, the *USS Nevada* was the only battleship that had managed to get underway. But, this was brief; once hit she was beached so she would not block the entrance to Pearl Harbor.

He kept the group of explorers enraptured by a simple rendering of his thoughts during and since the day World War II began for the United States. Ten months before he had experienced an accelerated graduation from Annapolis; he was assigned as the Fire Control Officer on the battleship; his job: sight the twelve- and sixteen-inch big guns. On this, his first day of battle, they were of no use against the 350 planes that flew over Oahu in two

waves. They did use the five-inchers; maybe 10% of the Japanese planes were destroyed that day.

Once he reached the bridge that afternoon, the view was horrific. There were fires everywhere; many ships sunk—there had been over one-hundred ship in the harbor! We lost almost as many killed as were lost on 9/11!

Dr. Merdinger was not injured during that war or in Korea or in Vietnam—he attributed this to his good fortune. Good fortune that allows him to look back on a life filled with rich experiences. He noted that General Billy Mitchell had anticipated an aerial attack on the enclosed harbor at Oahu as early as 1923; a planning exercise at the Naval War College predicted the same in the

mid-thirties. The U. S. anticipated, as well, that war with Japan was just a matter of time. Still, when it happened, it was a surprise; the Japanese navy had managed to cross a vast ocean to within 250 miles of Honolulu, undetected. Super-secret radar, in its true infancy, may have detected the planes once airborne, but a squadron of U.S. B-17 bombers was scheduled to arrive about the same time. Distrust of the new-fangled tool, and knowledge of the Army Air Corps plans, discounted an alert. We were simply caught off guard.

He does not hold a grudge against the Japanese; they were highly professional. As a military they exercised their maneuver flawlessly. Since the war he has met officers who participated; there was mutual respect. We won; he put the war behind him! Almost. His Naval Academy sword, in his room on that day 64 years ago, was found months later when the ship was refloated. It was with him this evening.

The Dolphin Club was founded in 1877, and today is a nonprofit, public-access athletic organization with a diverse membership of about 900 women and men.

Members swim in the waters of Aquatic Park, row in the Bay and on Lake Merced, play in handball tournaments, work out in the bay-view weight room, and participate in the annual *Escape from Alcatraz* Triathlon. They also have great parties.

The Dolphin Club and South End Club buildings are owned by the S.F. Recreation and Parks Department and leased to the clubs. Both facilities are open to the public on alternate days each month, Tuesday through Saturday, for a daily fee of just \$6.50. Guests and members of the public must sign a waiver and an attendance log, or take the plunge and become a member!

The facilities:

- Boathouses for rowboats and kayaks
- Men's and women's locker rooms with showers and saunas
- Two upstairs lounge areas
- Ground-floor toilet and shower facilities
- Three inflatable motor craft to maintain safety during Club swims
- Weight room with free weights, pulleys, leg-press machines, exercise bikes, Stairmasters...and the best view in town.
- A flat-water rowing facility at beautiful Lake Merced, on the western edge of San Francisco in the Golden Gate National Recreation Area.

The Club has an exterior ramp for handicap access.



## Innovation

As all members know by now, our national President Richard Wiese will be resigning in March; a new slate has yet to be selected (at this newsletter's publication.) For those of you who may not receive *The New Yorker*, an article published in the October 24, 2005 issue is copied below. Richard, a true explorer, has been pretty innovative!

### RARE AIR

"There isn't much a guy can do to improve his physical fitness while sitting all day at a desk except maybe to squeeze a rubber ball, jiggle a leg, or eat a lot of bananas. This was the problem that confronted Richard Wiese, the president of the Explorers Club, as he planned an expedition to climb a pair of volcanoes in Mexico. His biggest obstacle would be the altitude (the volcanoes, Orizaba and Iztaccihuatl, are, respectively, 18,700 and 17,343 feet above sea level), and the fact that he would have very little time to become acclimated to it. Even seasoned climbers need weeks to get used to the thin air. Wiese, experienced as a mountaineer but encumbered by a nine-to-five job, would have merely days

"His solution, the fruit of some Internet poking around, was to have an altitude chamber installed in his office, on the third floor of the club's headquarters, a Tudor-style mansion on the Upper East Side. The chamber, made by a company called Hypoxico, is a transparent plastic box, nine feet by six feet by seven feet—the size of a walk-in closet. Amid all the club's artifacts (Admiral Peary's sledge, Thor Heyerdahl's globe, Peter the Great's side table), the chamber seems out of place, like Pei's pyramid at the Louvre. The air inside simulates that which you would breathe high in the mountains: it contains less oxygen. A month before leaving for Mexico, Wiese moved his desk into the chamber and began conducting his daily business at the equivalent of thirteen thousand feet. This was, as far as he could tell, "the first instance of an altitude chamber being used in an office setting." (And it may not be the last: it's not hard to imagine oxygen, like carbohydrates and

sleep, becoming a desirable deprivation among members of Manhattan's executive class.)

"At first, the mountain air got to him. He couldn't stay in the chamber for more than a few hours at a time, and in telephone conversations with the club's board of directors (who took to calling him B.O.B., for Bubble Office Boy) he found himself growing irritable and woozy. But after a couple of weeks he began to adjust. Thirteen thousand feet felt like flatland.

"On a recent afternoon, just prior to the Mexico trip, Wiese made room in his chamber for a sea-level visitor. Wiese is a youthful forty-six, tan and sandy-haired. He wore a Beretta shooting sweater and cargo pants. Once he closed the door, the percentage of oxygen in the air, as measured by a handheld monitor, began to drop, and along with it the amount of oxygen in the blood. A mild light-headedness set in. After a few minutes, the feeling was not unlike that of sitting atop the Grand Teton, if you were to factor out wind, cold, vistas, exhaustion, vertigo, and the problem of getting down.

"The chamber came equipped with a mask, which Wiese could strap over his mouth and nose. The air coming through the mask was even more hypoxic, like the air at twenty-one thousand feet. After issuing a few disclaimers, Wiese had the visitor strap on the mask. "It's going to be a horrible experience, and at some point you'll say, 'Take this off!' " he said. The mask went on, and within a minute the world grew heavy, the light presurgical. The pulse sped, as the blood's oxygen level dropped. "More of your cells are being killed than are being rejuvenated," Wiese explained. To mimic conditions inside a snowbound tent, Wiese and the visitor played a few hands of blackjack. "Look at you bobbing around," Wiese said. "Your eyes are looking a little buggy. Try standing up." This experiment did not go well. Nor did a brief one involving a step machine inside the chamber. Finally, the revelation that the visitor was feeling an unfamiliar tingling in the vicinity of his left femoral artery prompted an immediate removal of the mask.

"A small group of people had been watching all this from outside the chamber. Back at sea level, intro-

ductions revealed that they were Gary Kotliar, a spiffy Russian of indeterminate age, who had founded Hypoxico, among other businesses; a press attaché named Jared Rice; and Kotliar's associate, a tall blond woman named Yulia Soukhanova, a former Miss U.S.S.R. Kotliar began enumerating the chamber's powers of rejuvenation. "Did you know it is used already for treating untreatable diseases?" he said. He mentioned a few. It can also, apparently, serve as both a sleep aid and an aphrodisiac. "You are like bull," he said. "I'm, like, nineteen years old! It is the equivalent of ten thousand oysters."

"Wiese mentioned that a lot of climbers in the city work on Wall Street and are "cash-rich and time-poor," and wondered whether Kotliar might donate a hypoxic chamber to the Explorers Club, for members to use.

"Richard, Richard," Kotliar said. "That is a great idea."

— Nick Paumgarten, ©*The New Yorker*

## Chapter Dues 2006

Your officers are asking that each member of the Northern California Chapter pay Annual Dues of \$25. This amount is payable in January.

Why chapter dues? Each member already pays 'national' dues. What is going on?

The dues paid to our New York Headquarters cover the privilege and rights of membership and the costs of administrating the Club and maintaining its superb facilities. No chapters have a local drop-in facility, and those members that are 'residential' to New York pay an added fee for this routine privilege. The rest of us are welcome whenever we are in town.

Our chapter has approximately ten speakers each year and a picnic. In the past we have undertaken more extensive gatherings (the *Golden Gateaways*.) The dinner meetings are priced to cover the costs of each event.

In addition we have about eight newsletters mailed to some 350 people and added expenses that seem to crop up. Thus, the Chapter dues. Please respond, one and all.

Non-member newsletter recipients are urged to respond as well

# The Chapter Chair

Dear Northern California Explorers:

Thank you for selecting me to chair the Northern California Chapter of The Explorers Club; I shall do my utmost to continue our traditional high quality lecture series and to seek out other events that might prove of interest.

We begin with our second-year lecture following the January reception of the San Francisco Ocean Film Festival. Again the speaker will be at The Dolphin Club, adjacent to the City's other Bay-swimming club (The South End Rowing Club)—both near the corner of Beach and Hyde Streets at San Francisco's Aquatic Park. Members of these clubs can be observed any day of the year as bobbing white caps within the park's enclosed waters.

December was very rewarding: Arlene Blum was inspirational, Chuck

Merdinger enlightening, Robert Johnson educational. The de Young is a grand addition for the Bay Area. The Marine's Memorial a lovely venue, particularly warming with the crackling fire at our dinner. We continue to seek out the right venue/price balance for our meetings. Suggestions are always welcome.

In organizing our meetings I am calling upon individual members to manage all aspects of individual events: the locale, the logistics for items needed and coordinating with the speaker. Lesley Ewing has undertaken the January meeting in cooperation with the Ocean Film Festival folks and the visit by our speaker from Southern California. Steve Smith is coordinating February. Alan Nichols will help himself in March! Dave Moorer is working on the

picnic. We need two of you to step up for April and May.

A goal I would like to set for the near future is the on-going growth for our Chapter. Take a few moments to reflect on *why* you belong, and then find someone else who will have a similar appreciation. Propose they belong.

The Northern California Chapter is vying for third in the number of members, with the Chapter based in Austin. Washington, D.C. is second and New York, of course, first. The more members we have the greater draw we are to exciting speakers and the more diverse are our already-diverse interests.

See you in January for a very surprising talk. —Lee Langan, FN99

Cowell Theater  
SFOFF  
Film Theater



The Dolphin Club  
Explorers Club

Aquatic Park  
San Francisco

The Maritime Museum  
San Francisco Ocean  
Film Festival Reception

Reserve \_\_\_ spaces for **January 13, 2006**, at the Dolphin Club, San Francisco.

The lecture will be free.

Attend the SFOFF Reception before or grab a bite nearby. Guests welcome.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Guest(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Enclosed are my Chapter Membership 2006 Annual Dues of \$25.

Please mail this forms to

Dr. Anders Jepsen

23 Dos Posos

Orinda, CA 94563

or, preferably, email

[ajviking@aol.com](mailto:ajviking@aol.com)

or call 925 254-3079

## **Northern California 2005-2006 Event Calendar**

(Mark the dates! Venues will be identified at time of event.)

October 14, 2005 (Friday)	Dan Liebowitz	The Last Expedition, Stanley Across Africa
Delancey Street, San Francisco		
November 18 (Friday)	Arlene Blum	Breaking Trail: A Climbing Life
Sinbad's Restaurant, San Francisco		
December 7th (Wednesday)	Charles Merdinger	Remembering Pearl Harbor on the USS Nevada
Marines' Memorial Club, San Francisco		
December 9th (Friday)	Robert Johnson	Photographs at the new museum
DeYoung Museum, San Francisco		

January 13 (Friday)                      Doug Capone                      Planet of the Prokaryotes  
The Dolphin Swim Club, Beach Street, San Francisco

February 24 (Friday)	James McLane	Egypt -Exploration and Preservation of Ancient Sites
March 18 (Saturday)	ECAD (NYC)	What's Left to Explore?
March 24 (Friday)	Alan Nichols	Cycling The Silk Web
April 7 (Friday)	Don Walsh	to be determined
May 19 (Friday)		
June 17 (Saturday)	Dave Moorer	Annual Chapter Picnic

(unlisted events are all in the process of confirmation; see subsequent newsletters for the update.)

**In full and lively color!**

To experience this newsletter in color,  
see the PDF version at our web site.

**Please note venues and dates with care.**

**At 8:30 on January 13th, a FRIDAY meeting at the Dolphin Swim Club in San Francisco**

(When copying the URL addresses be sure to keep them all on one line; most are also available as links on our Chapter web site.)

*December 2005 - January 2006*

Lee Langan  
The Explorers Club  
Northern California Chapter  
2660 California Street  
San Francisco, CA 94115

