

## Anchoring in the reef environment

By Richard Chesher

Coral reefs are one of nature's most spectacular displays of life, representing thousands of species of sea creatures working together for millions of years to build the largest living structures in the world. But not many people get to see a healthy, robust, living coral reef, unless it's a very remote one.

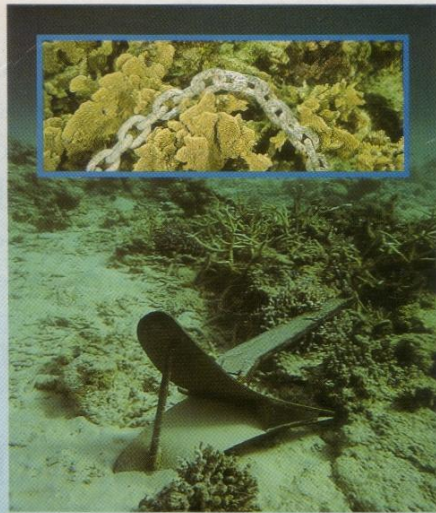
Sailors often debate the best way to anchor in coral. The biologically responsible answer is: *Don't*. Anchors and anchor chains wreck the fragile coral environments, and injured coral is prone to infections that can spread to adjacent areas. Whoever drops anchor in tropical waters has an undeniable responsibility to follow a simple rule: Anchor in sand, not coral—and get both anchor and chain in the sand.

If the coral is too dense in shallow water, anchor in water deeper than 100 feet where coral is rare and sparsely developed. Or, if there is no clear place to anchor in a shallow, coral-lined bay, anchor somewhere else and visit the coral gardens by dinghy.

Each anchor makes a difference. Be careful even with the dinghy anchor. Dive in and place it in the sand or hook it on a piece of dead coral. When snorkeling or diving, be careful with flippers. Walking or landing a dinghy on corals at low tide kills them. Corals may be hard on the inside, but the living tissue on the outside is thin and delicate.

Arrive at a coral anchorage when the sun is high in the sky and you can see sandy areas in shallow water. Polarized sunglasses will help you see through the water's surface.

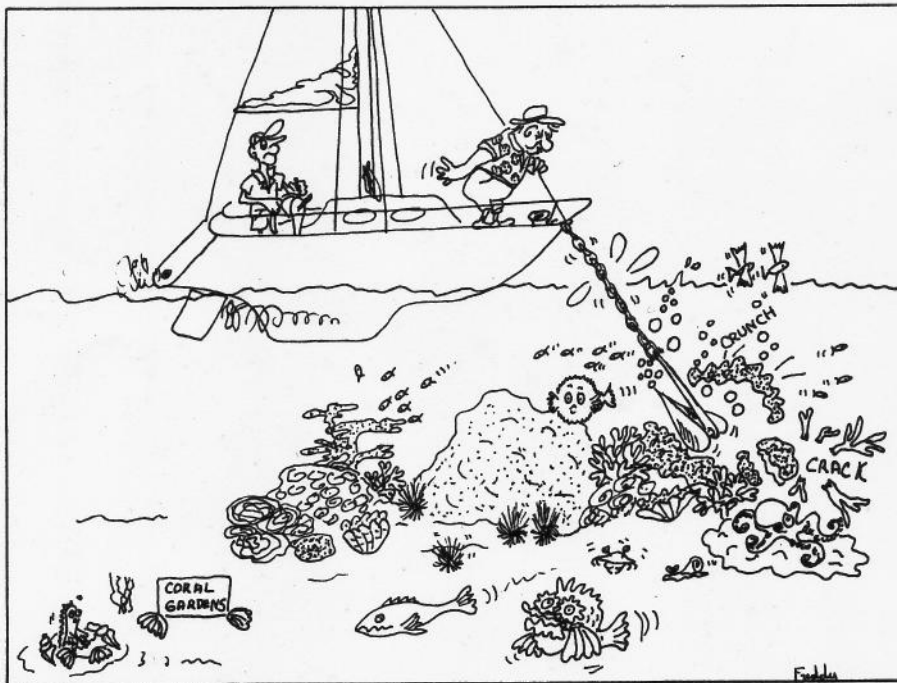
*Dr. Richard Chesher is a cruiser and a scientist associated with the Marine Research Foundation in the Pacific.*



**Anchors can cause irreparable harm to delicate coral; chain (inset) can be even more destructive**

Photograph (left) by S. Scott Cox; map by Marlene Jordan © 1994, Sail Publications

Richard Chesher



### Anchor Damage Caption Competition

Supply a caption for this cartoon and you could win a copy of Discover the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority produced the book which contains 96 full-colour pages depicting the wonders, ecology and marine life of this World Heritage Area. The Authority also invites comments on (1) specific areas where readers have noticed problems caused by anchor damage, (2) any specific idea people have for how these problems may be overcome and (3) any examples where readers have evidence of how specific strategies have worked to help reduce anchor damage on coral reefs. Send your caption and any comments to: 'Caption Contest', Education/Information Section, Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, PO Box 1379, Townsville Qld 4810.