



# JOURNEY TO THE CENTRE OF THE EARTH

RICHARD CARING AND HIS SONS BRAVED ICELAND'S FREEZING WATERS FOR AN EXPERIENCE THEY WILL NEVER FORGET WHEN THEY WENT ON A SCUBA DIVING ADVENTURE THAT IS NOT FOR THE FAINT-HEARTED.

Photography and words **RICHARD DEAN**

**FOR A WHOLE NEW EXPERIENCE** and to feel truly at one with the world, head for the Silfra gully at Iceland's Thingvellir National Park. Here you will find a place that redefines tranquillity.

**I travelled with Richard Caring and his two sons to this active tectonic plate region for an adventure few have encountered.**

Just a short drive from Reykjavik, scuba divers have the unique opportunity to plunge the depths of the crack between the American and Eurasian plates. We were to witness the point where two continents seem about to collide but are simply moving apart.

We arrived for our dive as rain poured down onto the lake at Thingvellir. The toe-clenching temperature of the Icelandic water – a mere two to four degrees – meant that we would be wearing dry suits. We were grateful to climb into the thermally insulated gear which prevents freezing water from touching any part of the body.

Once the necessary buoyancy checks were completed, we were submerged into the deep with our guide, and began a 45-minute underwater exploration. As we manoeuvred our way through the narrow tunnels, sometimes only two metres wide, I was struck by how clear the water was at these depths. We could sometimes see for 100 metres, which, as frequent divers will know, is staggering. The reason for this is that there's little aquatic life as there's nothing for fish to eat in this chasm. And this purest of water comes from a melting glacier which has been filtered through lava fields for many years before emerging, through underground wells, into Thingvellir lake.

As we swam through this ancient and untouched part of the planet, dramatic, almost eerie scenes unfolded. **The craggy sharp edges of the tectonic plates appeared to narrow and widen around us.** The brilliant blue of the water seemed even more astonishing when you remembered the grey sky above, as if this underworld was completely removed from real life. It was no surprise to learn that the lagoon was named Silfra – Icelandic for 'The Silver Lady' – because of the silvery quality to its light.

The dive could prove a challenge to those with minimum cold water experience – the dry suits can be restrictive. The suits also mean you must haul yourself out of the water while attached to 30 kilos of equipment and weights. But these inconveniences are a small trade-off for such spectacular visibility and a calm, clear dive with no swell. And the otherworldly feeling of swimming inside an awe-inspiring abyss will stay clearly in my memory forever.

*Black Tomato (www.blacktomato.co.uk; 020 7610 9008) can arrange a weekend Tectonic Diving in Iceland from £1,699 per person. Price is based on two sharing and includes flights from London to Reykjavik, private transfers and guiding throughout, two nights in a suite at boutique design Hotel 101 and a private group Tectonic Dive experience with equipment. A scuba diving certification is required for this dive.*



**DEEP WATER** (left) The divers head into the underwater warren of narrow crevices that signify the gap between tectonic plates

**DIVE DOWN** (above) Richard Caring and his two sons, Ben and Jamie, explore the depths of Lake Thingvellir