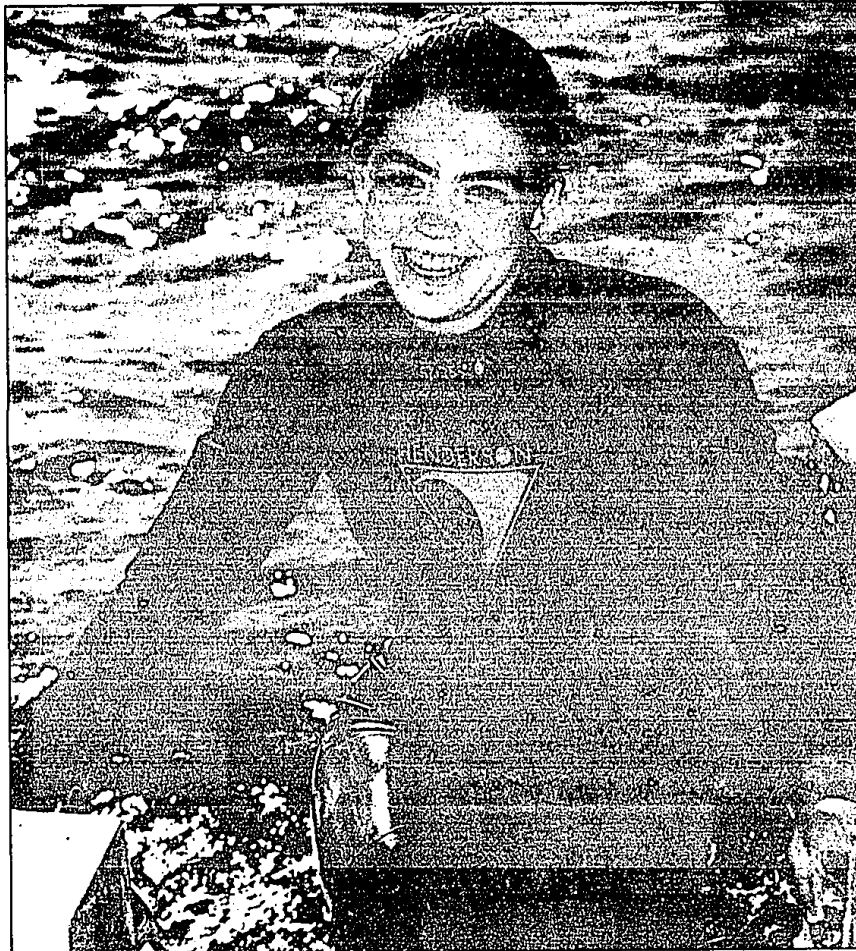


## JASON XI EXPEDITION

# Argonaut

Argonauts' Great myth — any of them who sail with Jason to search for the Golden Fleece.

## Mercy freshman goes to the extreme



BY KELLEY PITTS, SPECIAL WRITER

Following is Mercy High School freshman Kelley Pitts' account of her experience as a participant in the recent JASON XI "Going to Extremes" program. The 15-year-old student Argonaut was sponsored by Electronic Data Systems Corp.

### Day 1

Tuesday • Feb. 22:

Finally the day was here. I would meet Barb Zimmerman, my teacher Argonaut from Ohio, and fellow student Argonauts Whitney Brown from California and Seth Tucker from Connecticut. That was to be my group; we made up the Week 1 Argonauts in Key Largo, Fla. After a year of chatting online, calling each other, and e-mailing across the country, we were finally meeting. Barb, Seth, and I met first.

All of our planes came in around the same time, 9 a.m. We had to wait at the airport though for Whitney's plane to come in, at 3 p.m. Seven hours after I got into Miami, we drove off into the sunset (literally) to Key Largo. As soon as we got there, we met Mark Patterson, a host researcher from JASON XI.

We then went to our hotel, the Marina Del Mar Resort and Marina. When Whitney, Barb and I walked into our "home" for the next two weeks, we could not believe they got us a suite. We shared one suite, while Seth and Todd shared another. Whitney, Seth and I ate dinner and talked about the upcoming dive test for the next day. We all hoped we were not going to fail.

### Day 2

Wednesday • Feb. 23:

The next day, Barb woke Whitney and me up. It was time for the dreaded dive test. First up was the swim test. For me it was easy. Seth told me, "Don't do any of those fancy flips, and don't show off." I lapped everyone!

Next came snorkeling. We had to snorkel around our hotel pool a couple of times. Doug Keasling wanted us to practice being with a dive buddy, even though we were just snorkeling. Whitney was my buddy.

The last test was the dive test. We all passed with flying colors. When we finished at the hotel pool, we went over to NURC (the National Undersea Research Center). There we met Ellen Prager, another host researcher. Mark Patterson then assigned jobs to his graduate students (us). We had to assemble the metalballam chambers and the velocity probe. That night we went out to dinner with our host researchers.

### Day 3

Thursday • Feb. 24:

We could not go diving by Aquarius today because the waves were huge; they were

over six feet. Instead of diving, we went snorkeling in the Florida mangroves. When we got back to NURC, we worked on the jobs assigned to us the day before. Ellen Prager gave us a lecture on the halimeda experiment we would be conducting during the broadcasts. When we got back "home," a package was waiting for Barb. It was the wet suits. Henderson Aquatics donated wet suits for all the Argonauts in Key Largo, so I have my own wet suit now.

### Day 4

Friday • Feb. 25:

Today was our first dive in the ocean. We dove Little Conch Reef. Whitney was my dive buddy. Seeing coral for the first time was awesome. We also saw Aquarius for the first time; we went inside the gazebo and the wet porch. The workers on Aquarius kicked us out of the gazebo, though — The gazebo is where researchers go if there is a major emergency in Aquarius. They swim inside and wait for the rescue boat. There seemed to be hundreds of barracuda swimming around every side of us.

### Day 5

Saturday • Feb. 26:

We were supposed to have rehearsals today, but Mark Pat-

terson and Ellen Prager had some health problems, so we watched Houston rehearse. Today, we also went diving on Little Conch Reef to start collecting data for the coral survey we would be conducting during the broadcasts. While we were diving, Todd saw a nurse shark.

### Day 6

Sunday • Feb. 27:

Today we went to the Jules Vern Undersea Lodge. We had a lecture on the history of undersea habitats before we dove down into the underwater hotel. Once we were inside, Seth turned on "Batman," and we watched about half of it.

From there we swam over to the lab that they have there. We went inside all three underwater habitats that are in use in the world today.

### Day 7

Monday • Feb. 28:

It's the first day of broadcasts. I was the diver for the first broadcast. Luckily the TV show "Today" was just outside of Aquarius, so we did not have any speaking to do since we were not wearing aqua-masks. We worked with Mark Patterson, the underwater vehicle Fetch and with the velocity probe to find the flow rate of water being pumped out of a barrel sponge.

### Day 8

Tuesday • Feb. 29:

The second day of broadcasts was today. I was in the third broadcast. We talked about how they bring electricity down to Aquarius and the LSB (life support buoy). We also discussed the way they depressurize Aquarius. Mike Patterson gave us a tour of Aquarius, too.

### Day 9

Wednesday • March 1:

Third day of broadcasts is already here. It seems like we just got here. ABC was out on a boat today, getting interviews from us. We were inside Aquarius today, with Ellen Prager and Mike Patterson. Week 2 Argonauts got here today. Tomorrow they take their dive tests.



Extremes: Kelley Pitts, a Mercy student, dives off Key Largo as part of the Jason XI "Going to Extremes" program. Barracuda surrounded the divers.

### Day 10

Thursday • March 2:

Fourth day of broadcasts, and we have decided that we don't want to leave Key Largo. We were inside Aquarius again today. We talked with Mark Patterson about food. We talked about the types of food that they eat inside Aquarius and what happens to the food under two-and-one-half atmospheres of pressure. We also learned that your taste buds can be affected at the increased pressure.

Mark Patterson also discussed the head (nautical word for bathroom) on the broadcast. Later in the broadcasts, we learned about the types of SCUBA diving equipment they use, and how it's different from regular recreational SCUBA diving equipment. Everyone passed his dive tests for the

Week 2 Argonauts.

### Day 11

Friday • March 3:

Last day of broadcasts for us. We are so depressed. The Week 2 Argonauts came out on the boat to shadow us. Maria shadowed me. We discussed emergency procedures on Aquarius with Ellen Prager. I found this one of the most interesting broadcasts.

### Day 12

Saturday • March 4:

We did not dive today. We got to sleep in! NURC wanted us to decompress for 24 hours before we flew to Houston. They wanted to be extra cautious that we did not get decompression sickness.

### Day 13

Sunday • March 5:

We went to bed at 1 a.m. and woke up today to leave for Dallas-Fort Worth at 3:30 a.m. Our flight left Miami at 8 a.m. From Dallas, we flew to Houston. Jude, who is in charge of all the Argonauts, picked us up at the airport and took us right over to Moody Gardens in Galveston to meet up with the Week 2 Houston Argonauts. That night we went to the JASON board meeting. The Argonauts were invited for the first time. I got introduced to Dr. Robert Ballard for the first time tonight.

### Day 14

Monday • March 6:

We got a tour of NASA's Johnson Space Center today. We had pictures taken with Dr. Ballard and also met Bill Shepherd, a NASA astronaut.

### Day 15

Tuesday • March 7:

We return home today. We flew to Dallas-Fort Worth with some of the executives of JASON and the major sponsors. When we got to the Dallas airport, we had to split up at Whitney's gate. Seth's gate was on one side of the airport while mine was on the other.

The hardest thing was saying good-bye to everyone. We spent only two weeks together, but we all felt like we had known each other forever. We know we will never forget each other's friendship.



Swim: Kelley Pitts, one of the Argonaut students, does her work.