

Dive boat leaves couple behind

BY LISA FUSS

lfuss@herald.com

KEY LARGO — A California couple who went scuba diving in Key Largo saw more marine life than they bargained for: Their chartered dive boat inadvertently abandoned them, leaving the two stranded in the water overnight, six miles from shore.

Michael and Linda Evans, both 51, of Castroville, Calif., departed Aqua-Nuts Dive Center early Tuesday afternoon aboard one of its two 42-foot vessels for what was supposed to be a two-tank dive. When they surfaced after the first of two stops at The Elbow, a reef just outside John Pennekamp Coral Reef State Park, the dive boat — along with its 23 other scuba divers and two crew members — had pulled up anchor and left.

With wind speeds at around 25 knots, waves measuring up to four feet and water temperature dropping to the 60s, the couple managed to swim to the 36-foot steel light tower marking the reef and climbed atop its platform, where they spent Tuesday night and most of Wednesday, the Florida Marine Patrol said.

A passing sailboat spotted the cou-



AL DIAZ/HERALD STAFF

DIVE TRIP: Two Californians were inadvertently stranded in the water on an Aqua-Nuts Dive Center scuba diving outing from Key Largo.

ple, who were wearing wet suits, on the platform late Wednesday afternoon and contacted the marine patrol. Both suffered from exposure as well as minor cuts and scrapes to their hands and legs from climbing onto the structure.

On Thursday, the couple met with Aqua-Nuts co-owner Shirlee Thaler for several hours to discuss the incident and reportedly checked out of Kelly's on the Bay, the dive lodge next

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