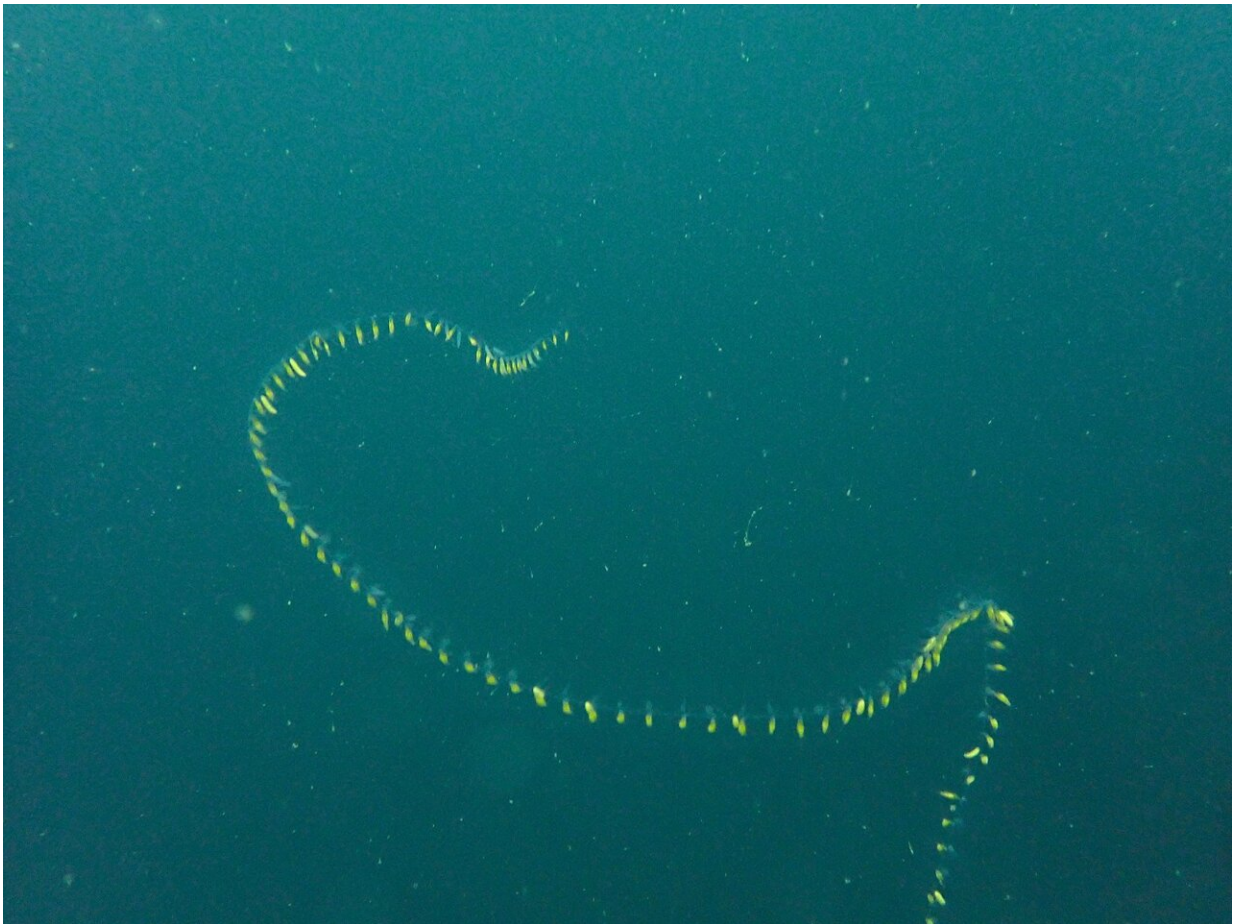


# Paddleboarder comes across mysterious, transparent sea creature off California coast

February 10 2023, by Amanda Lee Myers

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Southern California paddleboarder Bill Clements was 3 miles offshore

when he spotted something that looked more like a see-through floating spine than an actual animal.

Clements was by himself paddleboarding off Dana Point in Orange County when he spotted the long, gelatinous blob on Jan. 31. Filled with wonder, he picked it up.

"I didn't know what it was. I just saw something strange," Clements, 43, told U.S. TODAY on Wednesday. "I thought it looked like a snake but I was like, there's really no snakes out here in the Pacific."

Though Clements had no idea whether the creature would sting him, he said, he couldn't resist grabbing it out of a mixture of "blind curiosity and a lot of impulsivity."

In a post on his Instagram, Clements wrote that he came across a "strange creature on the water today!"

"This long strand of bioluminescent Jell-o appeared to be a single organism but when I took a closer look it was a chain of organisms all connected to one another. So interesting!"

## **Mystery solved**

Only later did Clements learn he had come across a sea salp, translucent invertebrates that are more closely related to humans than jellyfish despite their appearance.

"They look a lot like a jellyfish," said Karla Heidelberg, who teaches [biological sciences](#) and environment studies at the University of Southern California. "But these organisms have no stinging cells at all. They're totally harmless and they're unbelievably beautiful."

Shaped like a narrow barrel, sea salps can grow as long as a human, adding onto itself like a chain, she said.

The salp Clements came across appears to be 2 to 3 feet long, which Heidelberg said is special.

"The fact that he came across a chain that large right at surface, that's fairly uncommon," she said, adding that the creature generally prefers deeper water, especially during the day.

"He was very lucky to come across that."

## 6 wild facts about sea salps

- They move by pumping water through their bodies in what's considered one of the most efficient examples of [jet propulsion](#) among animals, according to the *Journal of Zoology*.
- Sea salps also eat using jet propulsion, consuming microscopic plants known as phytoplankton as they pump water through their bodies, the journal says.
- They may look more like jellyfish, but sea salps belong to the Tunicata, a group of animals also known as sea squirts. That makes them closer to the taxonomy of humans than jellyfish, according to the Coastal Interpretive Center.
- Some salps can grow so fast they can reach maturity in 48 hours. Increasing their [body length](#) by as much as 10% an hour, they're thought to be the Earth's fastest-growing multicellular animal, according to the Australian Museum.
- Sea salps are most commonly found in equatorial, temperate and cold seas, and the most abundant concentrations of the creatures are in the Antarctic Ocean, according to the Australian Museum.
- Sea salps are good for the environment. They remove [carbon dioxide](#) from the atmosphere by compacting the algae they've

eaten into tiny pellets that sink to the [ocean floor](#), according to Florida State University's Department of Earth, Ocean and Atmospheric Sciences.

## **More exploration to come**

Clements has only been paddleboarding since August 2021, inspired after seeing a solo paddleboarder while he was on a whale-watching boat. In that time, Clements, a longtime athlete, built up his endurance to go out farther and farther, something he discourages beginners from doing.

In his adventures, Clements has documented encounters with dolphins, many types of whales, jellyfish, sea lions and more.

He has even encountered sharks, but Clements said they've been too skittish and too fast for him to capture on video.

Though he's often tied to a computer for his IT job as a data protection services manager, Clements said, he gets out in the water almost every day before work and just about every weekend.

"The ocean is one big aquarium, and you never know what you're going to find out there. I love the unknown."

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Citation: Paddleboarder comes across mysterious, transparent sea creature off California coast (2023, February 10) retrieved 9 January 2025 from <https://phys.org/news/2023-02-paddleboarder->

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