

Fathoms

Official Magazine of the Victorian Sub-Aqua Group (est. 1954)

WINTER 2024



Dec 2023 Photo Comp. Winner - Imogen Manins - Climbing the Ladder - Portsea

Emerging Opportunities for diving with VSAG

Labor Day Adventures March 2024

Dive Reports - Hogan Island & Christmas Island

Creating Diving Photo Coffee Table Books

Dick Charles - Australian Diving Pioneer

Diving The Silent Anzac



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Diving Hogan Island

DIVE TRIP REPORT

by *Elodie Camprasse*

One of the reasons myself and Matthias Klapperstueck joined VSAG was to get out of our comfort zone, get to experience new dive sites, meet new dive buddies and do more boat dives. The club has offered us exactly that and so much more. We've made new friends, discovered amazing dive sites, learned so much about boating and diving already but the main highlight so far for me was the two trips we went on to Hogan Island! When I first chatted to Grant Callow, Grant Brittain and Stuart Cousins about the trip during one of our club nights, I knew it was a special place I wanted to visit.

The trips

25th – 28th January 2024

Hogan Island is located in Bass Strait, Tasmania (actually a stone's throw away from the border with Victoria), around 40 kms south-east of Wilson's Prom. Made of granite and limestone, it's the largest island of the Hogan group, roughly 2.8 km long and 1.5 km wide.

Eight of us (mostly VSAG club members) woke up bright and early on the 25th, excited to be part in Aquaholyx's maiden voyage to Hogan. After loading all the gear on (dive gear, dive compressor, food, water, camping equipment, firewood, raft, etc), we launched from the Port Welshpool boat ramp. We were lucky to have great conditions, which made it for an easy, 2-h ride to reach the island, at times, in the company of hundreds of shearwaters. We enjoyed 4 days and 3 nights on the island. The weather wasn't as kind to us and the rough seas made for an extended trip back; it took us a little over three hours to journey back to Port Welshpool this time around.

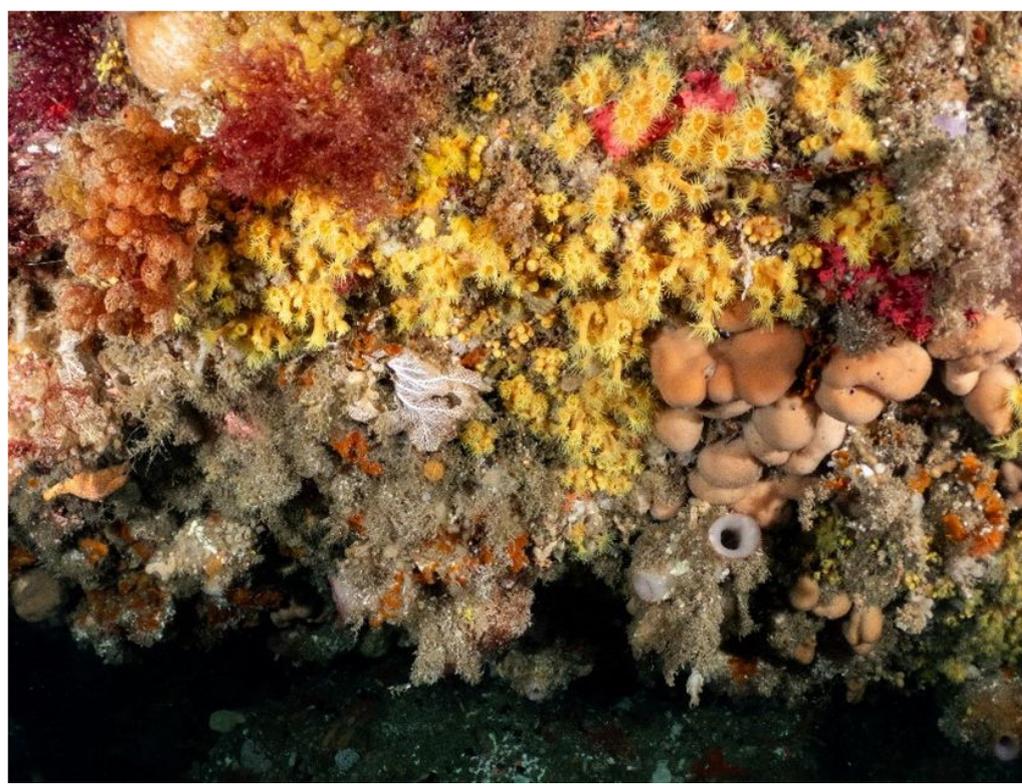
28th March – 1st April 2024

Another group - 8 of us – went back to the island over Easter, and that time the conditions were absolutely perfect. An other early start on the 28th March and good weather allowed us to reach Hogan from Port Welshpool in under 2 hours. We arrived mid-morning, unloaded and set up camp for 5 days. Because of the

good weather this time, we could enjoy boat dives every day. Literally as we finished packing up on the last day, a thunderstorm started to hit and the ride back wasn't nearly as smooth as on arrival but we still made good time.

Hogan's diving

Prior to the trip, I had been told to expect lots of fishes, including bigger fishes compared to Naarm/ Port Phillip Bay (near Melbourne, Australia) where we usually dive, swimthroughs covered with colourful fixed marine life, and healthy kelp beds. I had heard stories about playful dolphins too. I was not disappointed, even during the first trip despite the rather average conditions, driving visibility down! The winds were stronger than expected, but we still had a lot of fun.



Hogan Island cont.

Different parts of the island are accessible depending on wind conditions although we barely scratched the surface during the first trip as we couldn't do as many boat dives as we had planned. The windy and rough conditions sometimes confined us to the sheltered bay by the hut, and the adjacent bay, which are still great dives with dense seaweed beds, including golden kelp, and a great variety of fishes.

Three dives were shore dives close to camp, which allowed Matthias and I to explore the surrounding golden kelp beds. We found eagle rays and Port Jackson sharks there, and lots of the 'usual suspects' of the Great Southern Reef - a variety of leatherjackets, old wives, sweeps, morwongs, different wrasse species, marblefishes, zebrafishes, drummers, rainbow and herring cales and more! In the shallower parts of the bay, school of garfishes and of young silver sweeps and mado sweeps were seeking refuge from predators. We also marvelled at all sort of brown, red and green algae, and a few colourful nudibranchs and sea stars.

I was very excited for the opportunity to do a night dive on the second day (I am a huge fan of night dives!) but the one we did near camp was eerily quiet, in total contrast with the night dives I am used to under the piers of the Naarm where the abundance of life and constant action is an absolute delight, particularly at that time of year. We still spotted interesting creatures that made braving the darkness and eeriness worth it, including a sea spider, a swell shark and a few Port Jackson sharks. One of them was munching on the remains of a little penguin's leg, which I assumed fell to the seafloor after being consumed by a larger, pelagic predator.

During the first trip, we also enjoyed three boat dives, which allowed us to discover different landscapes. Grant C, Grant B, Dave, Matt and I had fun exploring



swimthroughs amongst boulders decorated with abundant colourful life including delicate sea fans, orange sea whips with occasional baskets stars clinging on to them, yellow zooanthids, bryozoans, ascidians and sponges of all sorts and shapes fighting for space in every centimeter of available substrate! Fish life was abundant but what impressed me most were the clouds of colourful barber and red perches I had only ever seen on photos before.

On our last boat dive, despite most uninviting surface conditions and average (dark, rather murky) subsurface conditions, Grant C and I unexpectedly stumbled upon a deep (~40 m) and magnificent sponge garden where conditions were calm and the visibility much better. Colourful sponges were rising proud on top of big boulders in and amongst ascidians, bryozoans, green coral and algae. The few minutes spent down there alone made the whole dive so worth it!

On the second trip, Grant and I revisited the sponge garden a couple of times, and really enjoyed spending more time in this very unique landscape. We mostly did boat dives this time around, and I enjoyed discovering



Hogan Island cont.

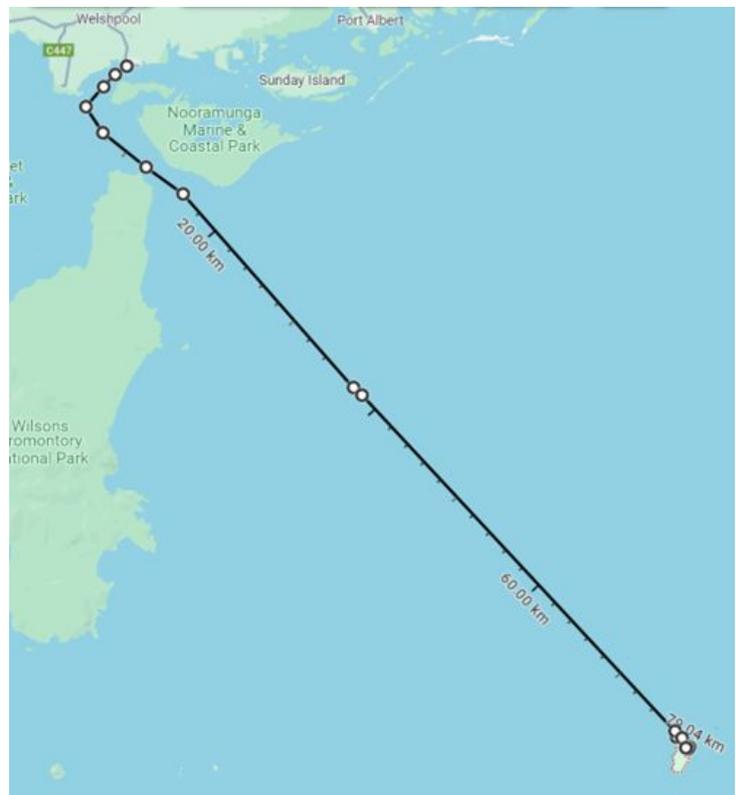
new sites and going back to spots I had gotten to discover a few months before – a total of 8 boat dives and one shore dive for me.

By far, the main highlight on this trip was to see bottlenose dolphins underwater with groups of 3-4 individuals, including adults and young ones. We all reflected on the fact that, although we had all seen dolphins at the surface, it was rather rare to get to see them while diving, at least in our part of the world, even more so on several consecutive dives. On a couple of occasions, we had good numbers of docile swell sharks in the deeper parts of our dives. Grant C and I were also delighted by a quick dive amongst Australian fur seals, which promptly left the islet they were resting on to come and check us out. The 'sea puppies' were darting around us in huge numbers and a chaos of tails, flippers snouts and bubbles, to the extent that taking any decent photo was a huge challenge. At the bottom of the dive, Grant found a ledge with around 30 Port Jackson sharks resting near each other, which made this dive even more special.

Island life

The last time I had stayed on a similar island, marvelled at the wildlife around me and the uninterrupted ocean views, I was doing fieldwork for my PhD on Gabo Island, near Mallacoota (Victoria, Australia) on Bidawal Country. Going to sleep to the sound of little penguins took me back to the time I was studying seabirds' hunting strategies there.

Once used for sheep and cattle grazing, the island is now inhabited and only a small hut remains. The original hut was maintained by a VSAG member, Grant, who rebuilt it after it burnt down a few years back. The hut is great to seek shelter from the rain and mozzies,



warm up by the fireplace, and allows for easy meal preparation.

Good weather-proof and wind-proof tents are necessary for comfort as the weather can change rapidly and winds can be very strong. Those who still want to keep in touch with civilisation (but why would you, except for retrieving the weather forecasts?!?), can take a short walk to the top of the hill near the hut. People wanting to visit Hogan Island need to bring their own food and water (though there is a spring and watering trough if needed but it's high in nitrates). Being willing to live in basic conditions is a must to (no running water, toilet or shower, but it is so worth it!)



Hogan Island cont.

Landing is via a small, shallow and sheltered bay to the North-East of the island, which is regularly used by kayakers and fishermen.

Due to cattle past farming and cattle grazing, the natural environment is heavily modified and the majority of the island is grassland. Although the most exciting part of the trip was to discover the incredible marine life of the area, wildlife on the island can be enjoyed too. Nesting seabirds inhabit the island, including penguins, shearwaters, gulls and oystercatchers, as well as several species of skinks.

Thanks!

I feel very privileged to have been on these trips and want to thank Grant C, Grant B, Stu and anyone who helped out in the process of refurbishing Aquaholyx (as well as the truck and trailer!), the coastguard boat that they bought to bring divers on Hogan, amongst other adventures. I tremendously enjoyed the company of the other members of the groups we went with – sharing great food, drinks and stories around the campfire after exciting days spent diving. Many thanks to Peter Galvin for offering the group accommodation in Inverloch as well!





DIVING HISTORY

Richard (Dick) Charles - Australian Diving Pioneer

by *Des Williams*

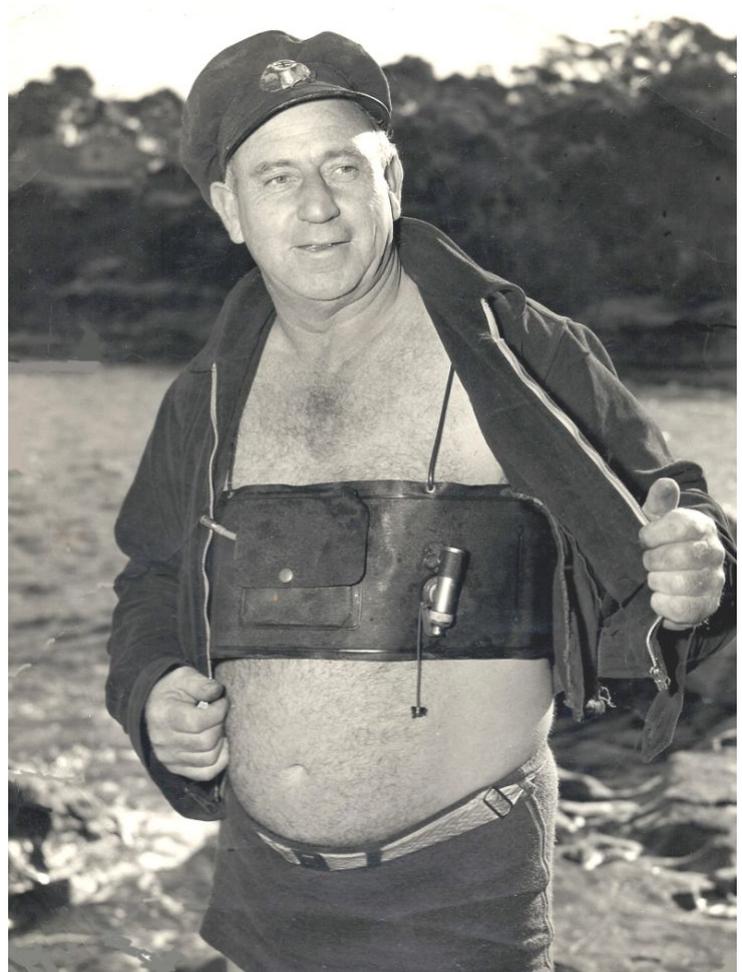
Once again, let's turn the spotlight on one of Australia's pioneer SCUBA divers. Australia has produced many outstanding scuba divers, underwater film-makers, equipment technicians, spear-fishers and innovators. It all started in the late 1940s, when the sport of spearfishing was pioneered by Sydney divers including Dick Charles and Edward Du Cros, who formed the Underwater Skindivers & Fishermen's Association (USFA) and immediately began promoting the sport around the country it grew rapidly! In this report, we salute Sydney pioneer sport diver, Dick Charles for his diver's safety belt. It was ahead of its time and has certainly been improved since the 1950s.

A record of Australian pioneer diving would be incomplete without reference to the amazing contribution made by Sydney diver, Dick Charles. Born in England, he moved to Hobart with his family in 1913, where he later took up an apprenticeship as a fitter and turner with the IXL Company. He then moved to Sydney where he became an aircraft mechanic at Mascot and married Ruth Kelly in 1923.

Dick was a skilful and motivated inventor of his era, who built his own speed boat and in 1927 founded the St. George Motor Boat Club. His boat, for a time, held the Australian speed record at 89mph. He then moved into manufacturing caravans and produced Australia's first "pop-top" unit and took out a Patent.

During WW2, he produced a special patient stretcher pulley apparatus which was used to carry injured soldiers in New Guinea and further applied for use by the Police Rescue Squad for cliff rescues. In 1937, whilst on holidays, Dick became interested in spear-fishing. It was a brand new sport which quite often led to conflict with anglers of that era. Dick decided that unless spear-fishers united and took control of their new sport, there was a chance that anglers might create enough opposition to have spear-fishing totally banned.

On the 4th April 1948, Dick called a meeting of spear-fishers at Long Reef NSW, with the aim of forming an association to protect their new sport. From this meeting which was attended by hundreds, the Underwater Skindivers & Fishermen's Association (USFA) was formed.



Dick Charles wearing his safety belt.

Dick and Ruth Charles at Lord Howe Island in the 1950s.

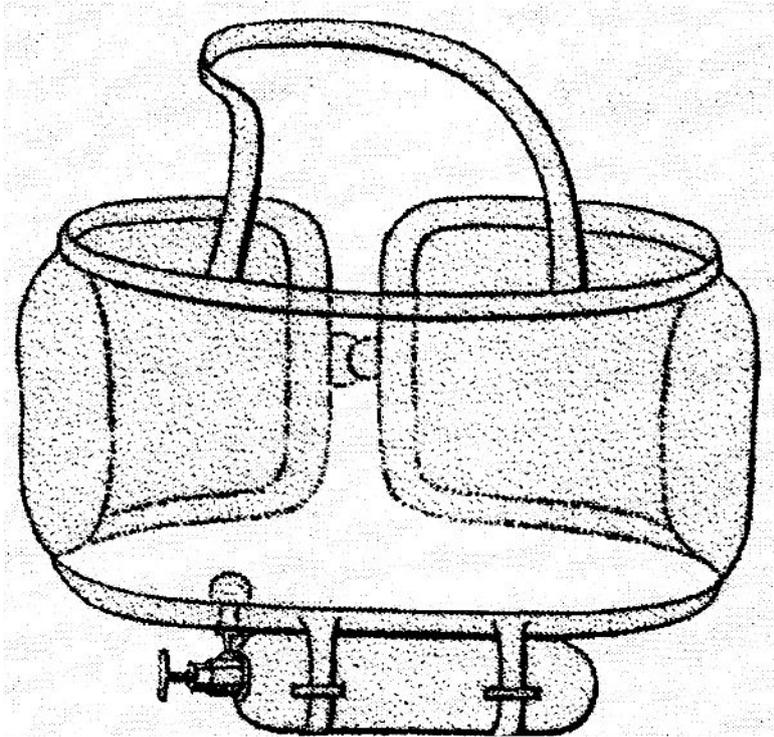
Dick Charles cont.

As the association's first President, Dick Charles guided the association through its formative years between 1948 and 1953. Members of the USFA Committee travelled around the country, promoting and nurturing the sport, which eventually morphed into the USFA of Australia under Dick's guidance in 1953.

It was about this time, that Dick Charles became increasingly concerned at the number of tragic deaths amongst skindivers. When popular USFA diver Merv Caulfield lost his life at Harbord in September 1953, leaving a young wife and infant son behind, Dick announced at a USFA meeting that he was working on a safety device.

The result of his inventive skill was The Dick Charles Safety Belt, an inflatable floatation belt worn like a cummerbund. Today, all scuba divers wear a buoyancy compensator or BCD, but this device was a much smaller unit, to be inflated by a CO2 cartridge only in an emergency. Australian ingenuity was once again at the fore-front of the diving industry. By October 1953, Dick's device was in full production selling for 75/- which would be approximately \$120 today. Designed primarily as an emergency floatation device, it was marketed as suitable for divers and anglers alike. A pull on the trigger would allow the CO2 canister to inflate the belt during an in-water emergency. Within three months of the product launch, it had saved two lives and Dick incorporated the number of lives saved in his newspaper advertising for the product, as that number increased.

Despite the introduction the Dick Charles Safety Belt in the 1950s, the concept of a safety floatation device for divers was curiously, almost totally ignored during the 1960s, even as interest in recreational scuba diving grew in Australia. During that period, very few divers wore a buoyancy vest of any kind and those who did so, seemed to favour the FENZY inflatable vest.



Thornthwaites BCD of 1838.

Incredibly, the idea of a buoyancy compensator vest for divers was mooted way back in the 1830s, yes, 173 years ago! In 1838, a London inventor by the name of W.H. Thornthwaite, was awarded a Silver Medal from the Society of Arts for his inflatable belt "to assist divers to bring heavy weights to the surface and save drowning persons". It came complete with an air pressure cylinder, just like the old FENZY vest of the 1960/70s. Unfortunately, the idea did not take off and a contemporary newspaper report claimed it was "Ingenious, but its utility doubtful and not likely to be tested". Thornthwaite must be turning in his grave, as every recreational diver today wears a BCD!

Join Us!

Sat 21 Sep 2024

Bentleigh RSL

538 Centre Rd, Bentleigh



MARINE RESEARCH

Solving spider crab mysteries with your help!

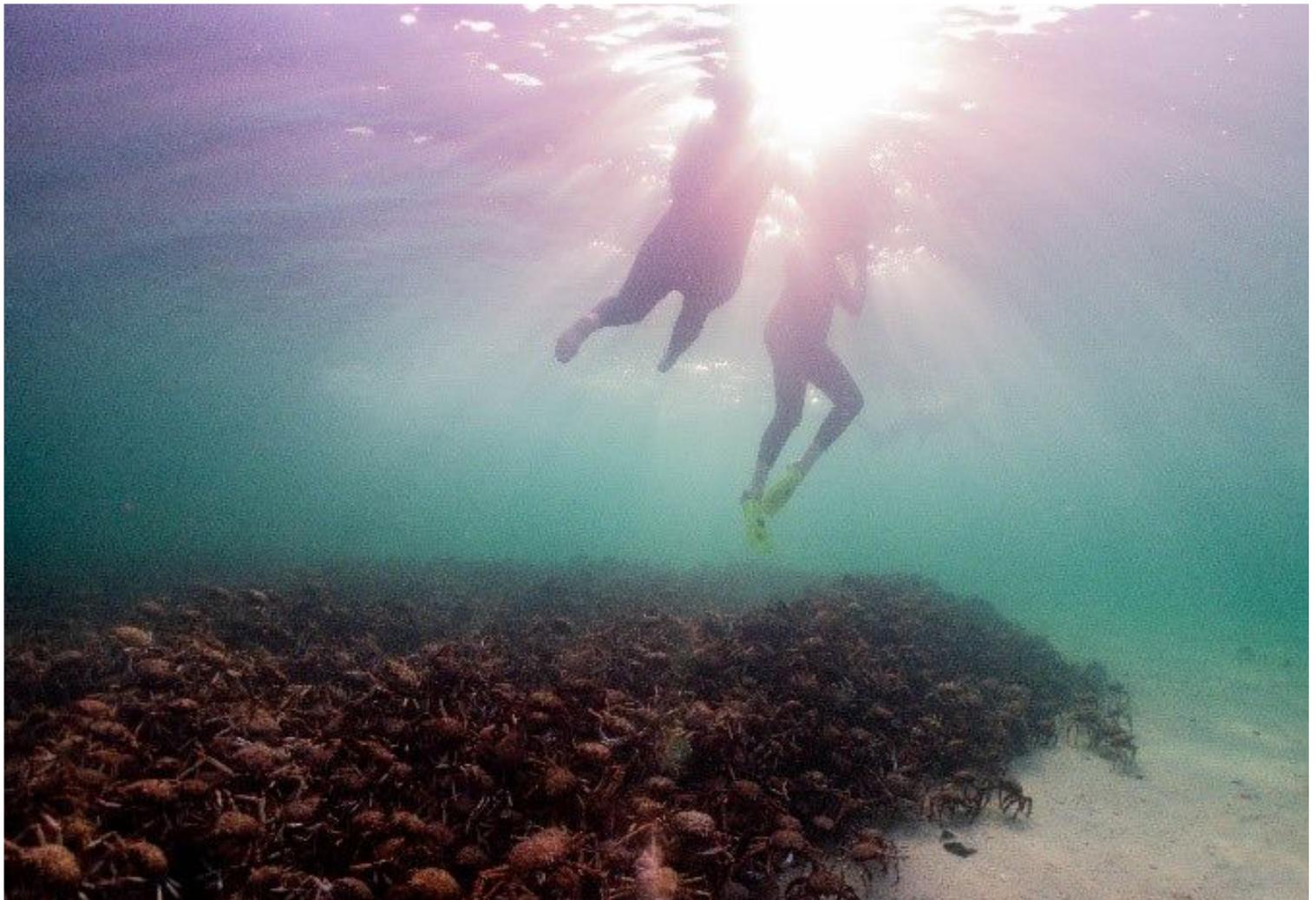
by *Elodie Camprasse*

I would argue that one of the best reasons to brave the cold and go for a dive or a snorkel in winter in Naarm/Port Phillip is to witness one of the most spectacular and mysterious gatherings of marine invertebrates – Great spider crabs! Of course, as a penguinologist turned crabby, I am a tad biased. However, this phenomenon, which happens in the Bay and other parts of the Great Southern Reef (the southern coastline of Australia), is truly unique. It happens nowhere else in the world and is surrounded with mysteries – where do these crabs come from? Where do they go to afterwards? Are they in the Bay all year round or do they travel from Bass Strait? What environmental cues trigger the gathering of crabs (scientifically referred to as an aggregation)? Is it the phase of the moon? Is it a drop in water temperature? Though many locals do have their own, slightly different theories, there is no information in the scientific literature and this phenomenon had not been formally studied until 2022, when our research team at Deakin University received funding from the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action to do so.

Spider crabs are arthropods, animals with jointed legs and a hard shell; that shell acts a bit like an armour, which means that the crabs cannot grow bigger like you and me – they need to shed their shells first, they pump themselves full of water and then harden a new shell on top of their bigger bodies. This process is called moulting. Before their new shells harden, the crabs are soft and vulnerable to predators. This is thought to be the reason why those crustaceans come together en masse – to seek safety in numbers. Spider crab aggregations and moulting has been reported more so on Bunurong Country, on the Mornington Peninsula, although it seems like they perhaps congregate often in various parts of the Bay.

Together with other Deakin researchers, we started doing scientific surveys with towed cameras to estimate the numbers of crabs in an aggregation, catching and measuring crabs (under permit approved by an animal ethics committee) to know whether they were males or females and understand which size classes were gathering during winter, and doing some acoustic tagging to understand the crabs' movements after they leave their aggregation site.

We also deployed 'Crab Cams' to monitor the activity of spider crabs and the marine life that is



Spider Crab Mysteries cont.



found in association with the crabs. With those methods, we obtained for the first time a better understanding of an aggregation, which was spotted at St Leonards, on Wadawurrung Country, on the Bellarine Peninsula.

This aggregation was estimated to cover between 1773 and 2104 m² and to comprise of 31,012 and 50,729 spider crabs across different days. Now, that's a lot of crabs, but we just don't know how this compares to other years yet, so it's hard to know what is a 'normal' or 'good' number of crabs and whether this varies through time or in response to various pressures put on marine life by human activities. Out of the 50 crabs we tagged with small acoustic devices, 27 were detected in the Bay across 13 'listening' stations in the Southern, South Western parts of the Bay and the Heads for months afterwards, suggesting that they

could stay in the Bay, or delay departure if they do leave the Bay and come back on an annual basis. We are hoping to repeat this work to obtain more information on the spider crabs' movements and obtain more data to make comparisons between years.

There isn't enough funding, or marine ecologists for that matter, to spend time on and in the water, day after day, all around the Bay throughout winter and beyond, to keep tabs on the spider crabs' whereabouts, especially when we know so little about where and when to start. So we're using help from ocean lovers like you! Anyone's welcome to join Spider Crab Watch, the citizen science program we have been running since 2022 to help answer questions around the locations, timing and duration of aggregations, and around the importance of these aggregations for other marine life, including predators.



Spider Crab Mysteries cont.

The program has two components - the reporting of spider crab observations, and the review and annotation of images obtained thanks to our trusty 'Crab Cams'.

We love hearing from people who have seen the crabs and anyone can log information on Spider Crab Watch on iNaturalist. It is a quick and easy process and observations can be logged with (ideally) or without images of the crabs. If you're keen to log a sighting, you will be asked to provide the date, time and locations of any encounters, as well as to answer a few questions about what they have seen. We use these observations and associated information to correlate sightings with environmental conditions (moon phase, temperature and more) to understand what might trigger the gathering of spider crabs, and/or their moult. As we know so little about spider crab interactions with each other, other species and their environment, any photo submitted on iNaturalist has the potential to reveal new information about spider crab behaviour and ecology – e.g. what eats them, what do they eat, when and where they mate, etc. Historical information is also very welcome, so if you have any information about when you saw spider crabs

in the past in your logbook, you can log that information too. At the moment, we are particularly interested in sightings of moulting crabs (rather than simply aggregating) to make quicker progress in working out the environmental cues that trigger moulting.

You can also help us by reviewing and annotating 'Crab Cam' images on Spider Crab Watch on Zooniverse. This work helps us understand how important spider crabs are for other species (including ourselves!) and the best part is - you don't need a marine biology degree to get involved! There is a tutorial to guide you through the activities and a field guide that shows examples of the animals and interactions we're focusing on. This project is still ongoing at the time of this writing and you can view images from 2022, but after spider crab season is over this year, we will upload a fresh set of images collected this year on the Mornington Peninsula thanks to funding from Parks Victoria. Thanks to your annotations, we will be able to gain a better understanding of the progression of an aggregation (when crabs gather, at what point they start moulting, how long the moulting lasts, etc). This work also helps us pinpoint the kind of species that might benefit from the spider crabs being around – including predators and marine life that feeds on spider crabs' remains. Another focus is to



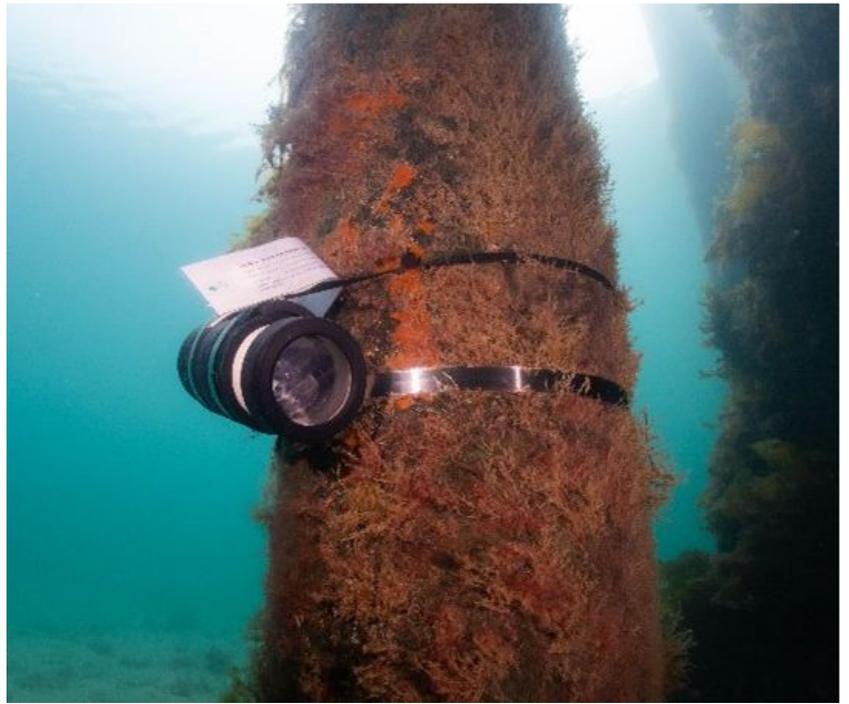
Spider Crab Mysteries cont.

understand human interactions with the crabs (including diving, snorkelling, fishing, etc).

In 2023, we released our findings from the 2022 assessment - below.

I look forward to seeing how our understanding of this incredible and unique phenomenon progresses with your help, and shall provide updates to anyone interested.

Feel free to reach out to me at elodie.camprasse@deakin.edu.au, or on social media (search my full name on LinkedIn, Facebook, X, and Instagram) for any questions, for more information, or to let me know about any cool spider crab encounter.



Relevant links:

Log sightings on Spider Crab Watch iNaturalist: <https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/spider-crab-watch>

Help us review and annotate 'Crab Cam' images on Spider Crab Watch Zooniverse: <https://www.zooniverse.org/projects/spidercrabwatch/spider-crab-watch>

For more information on our research, see this report: https://dro.deakin.edu.au/articles/report/Giant_spider_crab_ecological_assessment_in_Port_Phillip_Bay/23306219

Take our survey to help us improve the Zooniverse if you've participated and can provide feedback: <https://redcap.deakin.edu.au/surveys/?s=MKCHE8WNCKEJHTWA>





VSAG Labor Day Adventures March 2024

by **Angus Stuart-Adams and David Geekie**

VSAG Labor Day Long Weekends have proven to be successful in the past given the weather in Melbourne is tending to settle down and the water temperature is getting to its maximum and so the committee looked to hold another event this year.

Once again, the LWE coincided with favorable tidal streams that allowed Flood Slack dives in the Rip on the wall (still my favorite dive in Melbourne) as well as easier exiting of the bay in the morning. Ideal for a Queenscliff based VSAG weekend. Thanks to James for securing accommodation for between 8 and 10 at Point Lonsdale.

After an extensive email campaign we ended up with the following boats participating:

Mistress (Angus): after a trip across on the ferry. Allie Bechurst provided storage at her place nearby in Queenscliff that allowed us to sort out boats, divers, tanks and gear etc each morning and afternoon.

Wave Rider (John and Prya): also stored at Allie Beckhurst's.

Interlude (Phil Page): brought in each day from Ocean Grove

Dire Straits (David): brought in from Bellbrae (near Torquay) each day. Grant Callow and Bert Parker stayed at Bellbrae with David

Carmine (Peter and Carole): based their boat at their Dromana holiday house and brought Imogen and Stuart across from Sorrento on Saturday and Sunday to join us on the water.

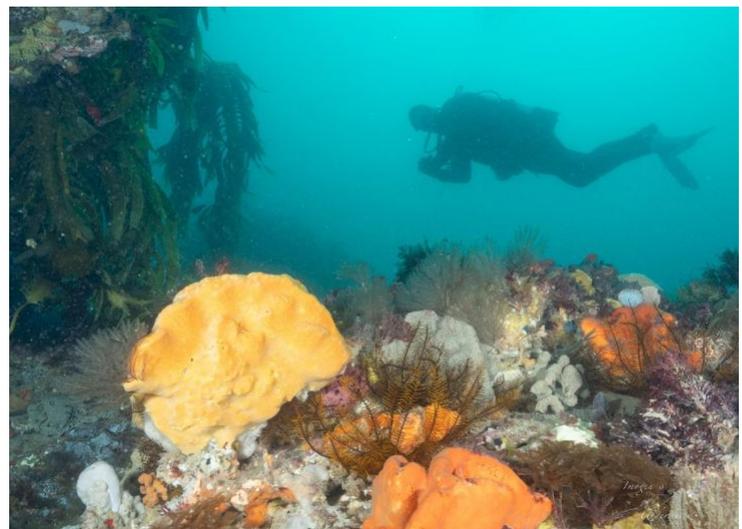
Scubado (Andrew): joined us on the water on Sunday after salivating while listening to our radio chatter on '73 on Saturday!

Friday Night

Angus - Gathering at the share house people arrive, excited, exhausted, happy the long weekend is here. In my 10+ years with VSAG, I've learnt we like to party and weekends away are truly eventful. It's warm at the house, no air-conditioning but the beer is cold, wine is good, and snacks come out.

Waiting around dinner is decided to walk to the Surf Life Saving Club house 15min away. Thinking this is a fancy building, I hope it has AC, we stumbled in, me feeling particularly a little disheveled but didn't care, hungry, as I left from Sydney at 6am this morning. Friday night was clearly a slow night, but they had a food van and the Brisket plugged that empty feeling. After walking home, I collapsed in bed from a food coma and exhaustion at 8pm-ish. But I'm still excited for Saturday.

Grant and Bert joined David at Bellbrae and loaded up the boat in preparation for an early trip across to Queenscliff.



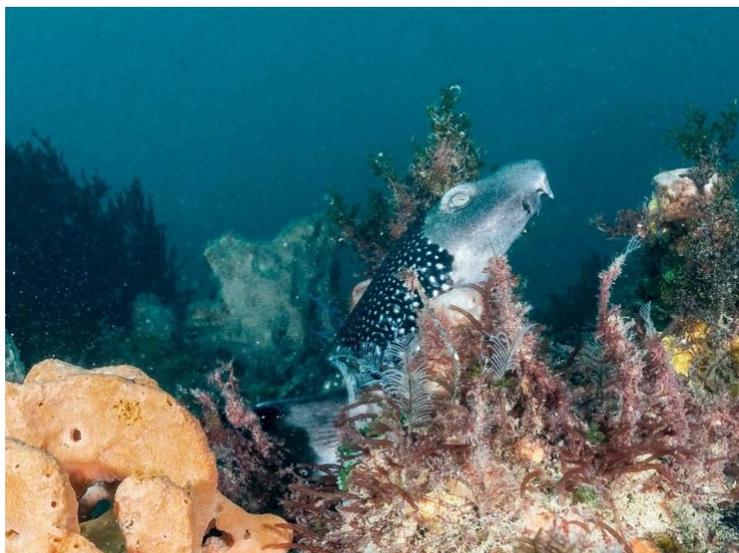
VSAG Labor Day Adventures cont.

Peter and Carole moved to Dromana in preparation for meeting their crew at Sorrento on Saturday morning.

Special thanks to James Cho for taking up the initiative for the booking and coordinating the crew staying at Lonsdale.

Saturday

Angus - The morning air is crisp as we gather at Allie Beckhurst place, prepping the boats before heading to Queenscliff boat ramp. The forecast is for 38 degrees, 30 knot northerly winds, so with extra water packed and with a sense of anticipation growing amongst the 14 divers everyone is double checking everything. Entering the Queenscliff boat ramp area, around 7 minutes drive, has the dulcet sound of VSAG boat motors rev'ing backing boats off trailers, only broken by the sounds of people pushing off and seagulls echoing overhead. I'm filled with excitement as I back Mistress off the trailer, our trusty vessel for the day. My crew Allie Beckhurst Boat Captain, James Chong, Vlodik Zmyslony and me Angus.



The ferry's in, so there's some backwash from it as we move to open waters and there's 2 boats waiting for me, last out but hey who cares we're out diving. After a quick 30min trip on smooth waters we're down at Castle Rock.

It's always great to have a boat captain, it just makes diving so much quicker!



David - Its never easy or straight forward organizing 5 boats and crews, coupled with different launch locations and times but somehow we all ended up at Castle Rock on Saturday morning. We had divers with varying skills, experience levels and interests so I decided we should start with this site as it is easy to navigate and allowed me to moor the boat and all dive together. I had Tiffany and Corey paired up and Grant and I dived together. This would ensure we could get most divers onto the Wall for the second dive. We had two live boats with skippers if there were any issues.

Having 5 boats with dive flags up hovering over the site fortunately dissuaded a dive charter operator from adding to the melee at the start of the dive

I always love the Labor Day VSAG Event but Queenscliff is a long way from Cranbourne where I store the boat. This will be my first dive in Port Phillip bay for like 12 months and David Geekie's plan to dive two sites brings back memories from when I was learning to dive, like 10+ years ago. The sites chosen were Castle Rock and Paradise Wall.

A quick mandatory boat briefing for those on the boat and we're off. It's a 5 knot departure from the boat ramp, past an armada of boats I could only dream of owning and a quick quip from behind comes "Company Money"!

Castle Rock 20 metres, 47 min dive time, 20degree water temp

Angus - Castle Rock, perched just outside Port Phillip Heads on the southwest side near Point Lonsdale, this site is a hidden gem and I have great memories from this dive site. For me, who at that time was a relatively inexperienced diver, this was the site that proved to me (thank-you Dive Vic for the pairing) that one can actually vomit through your regular and survive. In fact as I turned around at around 17m the guy I was paired with and who incidentally said he had a big night the night before, launched this white muck through his regulator

VSAG Labor Day Adventures cont.

several times, holding it dearly to his mouth and swimming through it. For the photographers in our club it is the most photo opportune time as fish life comes from nowhere to indulge in a quick breakfast and human tippie mixed with salt water. I can report nothing like that happened this time. Back to the dive trip.

David moored on the western edge of the rock and we all descended down Dire Straits' anchor line. The circular underwater mushroom shaped rock stands at around 12



meters from the surface, the sand is at 16-18 meters. As we descended on Castle Rock, we are greeted by a spectacular sight. The bommie's walls are adorned with intricate undercuts, splits, and ledges, giving it an other-worldly appearance. Jagged rock turrets crown the top and colorful corals to curious crustaceans, there's numbers of fascinating creatures amidst these rocky outcrops. Allie mentioned Castle rock has a circumference of about 200 meters, so surely having so many crevices and ledges, there has to be a cray of two here. As we dived around the rock looking in holes the marine life I remember is still there at little bigger maybe. Plenty of Blue Devils and other fish swim around. As we circle the base, there's one crayfish, up in a vertical ledge, too hard so I decided to keep looking. Finally found another small one, but a cray's a cray. Then came the next problem if I caught it, no catch bag. So I decided to do the obvious thing, worrying

about that fact after I caught it by hand. BTW ever noticed how everyone wants to help when you find a cray to catch? After a bit of a struggle I pulled the cray and just held it. Then James out of nowhere pulls a small bag enough for the body and legs to fit, feelers protruding, I carry this bag. Moving around we finally hit 70 bar and time to shoot the SMB's and get back to the surface. Back on the boat we checked the cray but being just size and female it was decided to throw back to spawn and catch in a few years' time.

Back on board the radio banter is alive. And the race is on to pack up and go inside for our surface interval prior to diving Paradise Wall and make it just before the flood slack tide.

Paradise Wall 17-30 metres, 32min dive time, 20degree water temp

David - I mentioned earlier that wall diving is my favorite dive area in Melbourne, it is a world class location and I am keen to share the experience with club members. I had dived the Paradise wall site a few weeks previously and appreciated the area at the top of the wall. It reached 16-17m and was interesting territory, extending the available dive time on a super conservative computer. The tidal inflow prior to the slack was quite slow so we planned an early entry to gain the maximum dive time prior to the runout tide which is always faster and once flowing requires a



Peter Campisano or Seal?

VSAG Labor Day Adventures cont.

timely exit. We had the shot planted 30 minutes before the slack and suggested we aim for an entry 20 minutes prior to the slack.

To place a shot on these locations I trail the buoy line behind the boat, I use a counter weight system with the buoy attached to a pulley that has the 50m shot line passed through it. One end has the 'heavy' weight, the other a light piece of chain. Both these weights are held in the boat as I slowly approach perpendicularly to the wall from very deep water. As the sounder shows I am passing over the top of the wall we drop both weights. This way the main weight should be within 2 meters of the top of the wall. I ask the first diver down to move the weight to just over the edge to make it easier to find on the way back.

My dive briefing is generally to go with the gentle incoming current (left shoulder to wall) for up to 15 minutes, then turn around, come up a little and come back to the shot line. If the current hasn't turned and you have dive time available then go past and explore the other side but don't go far as the tide WILL turn. Alternatively explore the area around the shot line at 16-17m.

Angus - A fast ride back to inside the bay, David drops the shot on his favorite spot. The Paradise Wall in Port Phillip Bay is a diver's paradise in the marine sanctuary nestled at the northern tip of the Lonsdale Wall. As the wall shifts from its usual south-to-north orientation to a west-to-east trajectory, the currents have sculpted a deep, mesmerizing landscape. Towering walls adorned with intricate splits and overhangs create a stunning backdrop, providing shelter for an array of soft corals and vibrant sponges. We all know timing is crucial for this dive, with the end of the flood tide offering the clearest visibility. The radio announces that "it's not



going to get better than this so dive dive dive" and everyone's ready to get in. As I fall backwards from the boat, I'm thinking, has David's shot hit the mark? 27m to the first floor following the shotline over the edge and boom a kaleidoscope of colors and marine life. David's shotline has done it again, on target. Swimming into the slowing current and looking in the hidden nooks and crannies teeming with underwater creatures, I'm marveling at the breathtaking scenery and diverse marine ecosystem, Paradise Wall is an unforgettable underwater adventure and marine life. Groups of barracuda, snapper, whiting swim around and of course those superb blue devils are always around. But it's easy to get lost in this as it was our second dive and my NDL was bouncing off 2 mins as the current turned and time to drift back to the boat's shotline. Checking with the team, 70 bar we decided to shoot the SMB's for practice and as we completed this, there in the distance was the shot line. Phew.

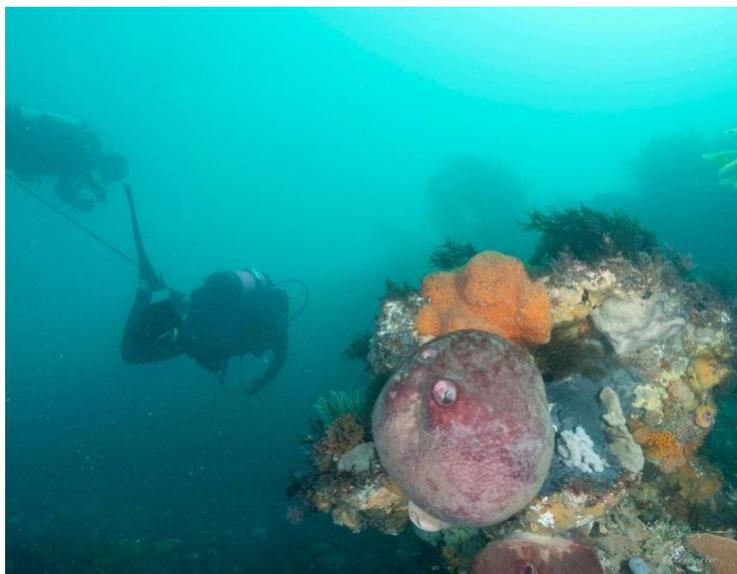


VSAG Labor Day Adventures cont.

Thanks Allie for skippering and making the dives so easy!

Peter and Carole head back to Sorrento, the rest of us head back into Queenscliff to the boat ramp, wash up and prepare tanks for tomorrow.

David - I had contacted Scubabo at Queenscliff and they were pleased to provide a tank filling service for us freeing us from running small compressors all afternoon and evening. MUCH APPRECIATED!



VSAG is so fortunate to now have access to Allie's place at Queenscliff, it made everything so easy. We stripped gear outside Boarfish Lodge, washed it in tubs and dismounted tanks into a trailer to take to Scubabo who promised to have them properly filled if we left them overnight and picked up at 8 the next morning. It was great that once the arrangements were put in place the VSAG culture of everyone contributing just made it all happen. When I returned on Sunday morning the tanks appeared as planned – it all worked.

Scubabo didn't fill a couple of tanks -some were out of test, others a little unusual but they provided replacement tanks at no extra charge which was gratefully accepted. These were ready for us on Sunday morning as promised.

Sunday - DAY 2

David - The conditions for boating and diving were once again excellent. We now had VSAG boat and diving crews most of whom had had two significant dives and bay entry and exit experience so it was suggested we head outside and do a shallower wreck, I suggested the J4. There was general agreement (and some very excited older rust hunters) so we headed outside and went west.

Unfortunately for Grant his ears were still tender from the previous dives so he had offered to skipper, an offer I gratefully received. This allowed our crew to once again all dive together and so Sandrine, Bert and I buddied up. It's been a long time since I dived the J4, it was great being back. I stayed outside topsides to keep

my conservative computer happy, my other one gives me at least another 10 minutes! Sandrine and I paused our descent at 18m given it was her checkout dive with VSAG but it was obvious Sandrine's previous experience as an instructor had prepared her for a J4 dive so we continued our descent. We did stay outside the tube, just poked our heads inside every now and again as a wreck penetration dive for a checkout was probably pushing the boundaries a little. The three of us stayed within NDL and had a relaxed ascent up my superbly placed shot line! (I was criticised for having the shot line too perfectly placed as it interfered with photographic excellence – you just can't please all the people all the time.)

Carmine then sent down a second set of divers while we had our surface interval snack. While waiting a dive charter (Medusa) approached. I contacted them on Ch 74 and they were polite and appreciative of the contact. They had divers undergoing a surface interval delay and were not impatient to drop a buoy or divers into the water. Once Carmine had recovered her divers we pulled the shot and Medusa thanked us for the professional communications.

J4 Submarine 26 metres, 47min dive time, 18degree water temp

Angus - James, Voldik and I rush to get ready in 35deg heat. Everyone's excited, the banter on the radio is clearly provocative, "David Geekie we will see how good you are with the shot line" one of the boat asks. Allie gives us a quick briefing about the sub's details, we agree on the plan. A final rehydrate, not too much as we don't want to have to do the extra special wetsuit wash. Allie parks us over the marker float, splash we're in, 35 degrees to brrrr like 20 on the surface in a flash.

My excitement is palpable as I descended through the classic Melbourne sea haze, and finally I can see the growth on the floor, no it's the sub its hulking form looming in the murky depths like a ghost from another era. Descending more I see the conning tower of this great relic from World War I resting quietly beneath the waves a silent sentinel of days long gone. Heading to it firstly to see the "Scratcher Sub Plaque" status that was added when they sunk the sub 1982. Note to self, bring the barbecue cleaning tool next time as it needs a lot of work.



VSAG Labor Day Adventures cont.

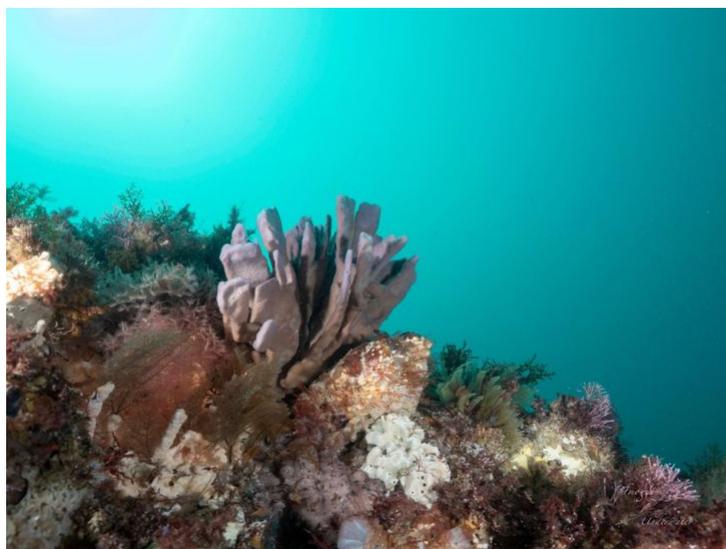
Now next thing, where did David's shot-line land? For those that know him, he's pretty particular and likes details and sure enough the shot's there at one end by the opening. Looking around I see my dive buddies so in I go reminiscing all the way oblivious to the fact that I had not checked that my buddies were behind me in the sub. Hmmm, oops.

As I finned along that now empty silent tube, through the submarine, I couldn't help but imagine the lives of the men who once called this place home, their camaraderie, fear, and the moments of quiet reflection between the chaos of battle. Carefully fining, I'm thinking about my first trip here looking for what's changed and always looking for escape paths. It's dark in the sub, but the light gives away those quick exits. Now at the stern, there's that door Allie said don't go in, full of pipes and structure, then I look around and realise James and Vlodik are not there. Time to reset quickly now, check my air, plenty and quick trip back to the entrance. Phew, there's Vlodik. This time we both swim along, inside the sub and out the stern and a little past.

Looking at my air and checking with Vlodik, 80 bar, it's time to go up. Too far back to the bow with the shotline, so time to practice SMB launching. This is always fun, and having Vlodik alongside me, he had to do it too! 16m from the floor, I let him know to shoot the SMB, which he does, then it's my turn. The pressures on, firstly where did I put it, yep found it. Did the unfurl of the flat orange tube, move the stainless snap to along the line, dump air from BCD, use the emergency ocky to fill, off it shot and my feeling of elation was rising with it as I'm thinking it would not look good if the President of VSAG stuffs this up. Deco done and popping to the surface Allie's there with the boat.

Dive 4: Ledges Dive Site 13m 48mins 19 degrees

Angus - Allie mentioned that this site is only good when the swell is low as the reef is inaccessible normally. Being shallow she also mentioned that the bottom is a series of hills and troughs cut by strong currents, but it was interesting and worth a dive. Furthermore, there would be a cray or two around as it is too difficult to pot



by the commercial fishers. At that point she had my real attention and it was game on. Voldik and I jumped in. The bottom was just as the name suggested ledge, and the current ripped and scoured the reef and our only safety was to dump all the air in the BCD and hug the sandy floor along the gully's.

Tonight was going to be the VSAG barbecue at Allie's place and I was keen to bring back a cray to share. We'd planned drinks, meat(s), salads, bread/ buns, did I mention drinks and a share cray. As my mind was drifting to no crays will be seen, to my delight, about 35mins in to the dive under a "ledge" was a sized 2kg cray.

With Voldik at my side, who may I say was there almost instantly with my catchbag open as I pulled the cray out from under the shallow ledge, I could see the smile on his face and mine too as in it went. At this point I was a little tired of being bumped against the reef and air was running low so we decided to go back to the boat. SMB up and back on the boat.

Back on the boat, with all done we're heading home, exhausted but happy.

David - After recovering the first set of divers above the J4 we had Carmine drop in 3 more divers who had been enthused by the reports from the first set. The other boats in the flotilla decided to head off in a few different directions, one of the benefits of having so many boats out. Scubado and Waverider headed for the Canberra while the other boats headed into the Ledges area, though Dire Straits didn't go as shallow as Mistress.

Once we had the last 3 divers up we headed for the Ledges area for an easy drift dive poking under all these nice areas that have been well picked over by cray bashers. Its so good to have an experienced skipper looking after your boat while diving it allows me to relax and just enjoy the dive – as expected the pick up by Grant after the dive was faultless.

Dinner At Allie's Place

Angus - Allie's place is such a great place to hang out. Spaces for boats, dive hut with bed and bathroom, outdoor eating area and her company is great. After all



VSAG Labor Day Adventures cont.

the boats are washed down, we're off to finalize dinner preparations, a personal cleanup and Allie's helping out with cooking the cray for dinner at 7pm.

Arriving around 7pm, music's going, people arriving, salty tales of diving adventures being told, the event is a great success and everyone is delighted with the weather, the diving, food and of course the company. During the night Allie's tells us her story which we all listened to intently, captivated and accepting. But that story is hers to tell.

David - It's a credit to the club that we have a culture that allows our members to take the initiative and pull together to create such a great meal and time together. It is also respectful and supportive resulting in a successful night on so many levels.

Monday Dives

David - Its almost unheard of to have 3 days of good diving weather so we didn't expect to have everyone hanging around but John and Priya (Waverider) offered to join us (Dire Straits) heading out to the Canberra. Once again Grant offered to skipper so we could all dive together. Mike and Bert dived off Waverider and Sandrine, Allie and I dived off Dire Straits.

To say Allie was excited to dive 'her wreck' would be an understatement. I think it may have been 5 years since

her last dive on her wreck. Allie has always been a caring, supportive dive buddy but once she hit the water on this dive we didn't exist! There was only the ship to check out!

Sandrine and I had a leisurely descent and headed aft from the bow area along the deck. Occasionally we would see some bubbles escaping from a hatch indicating our dive buddy was behaving like a seal somewhere below us in the wreck. I did penetrate the bridge despite the surge, when near the front windows the water flowed so violently outwards through the windows my hood and mask were vibrating and I was expecting to lose both of them. I beat a hasty retreat out of the bridge.

As we neared the aft area we met up with our seal like buddy and headed back towards the bow for the ascent. While underwater the wind had picked up earlier than expected so we made a decision to end the day while the conditions were still good.

Thanks once again to Waverider for taking out Bert and Michelle, it was generous to give up their Monday. I was also grateful for Grant hanging around to skipper instead of heading home early.

Thanks again to all the participants that made this such a great weekend. I have checked the tidal flows for next year for this weekend and they are not favourable so we should be looking at Phillip Island or some other similar location.



DIVING SKILLS

Reflections on the Equipment and Skills Training Day

by Cara Hull and Amy McKernan

I came to this skills and training session because I didn't want to shy away from the hard and ugly. My diving had become lackadaisical and needed a decent kick-up. I have been seeking this for quite some time but didn't know how to turn. I want to keep my diving recreational and safe but didn't feel that another "course" would do me any good.

This amazing day sure did give me that kick; my head is still working through scenarios and skills taught and practised. My gear had a makeover and I know I will continue to think and use many of these skills and methods on my dives well into the future. I can't thank you all enough. It was invaluable training that all divers should have.

Scuba diving is a sport and we should all constantly seek further education and advancement within ourselves to do any sport. Complacency can and does kill. A sport should be viewed as fun but practised with exercised caution. If anyone sees me in the water with my hoses over my shoulder please come and rip my reg out of my mouth ;-).

Thank you again, such a great day.

After that training, I've got a whole new respect for my gear. It's not just stuff; it's literally what stands between me and a serious problem. No more sharing—everyone's gotta have their own gear.

- Trying to locate my buddy blindfolded and then letting them know I was out of air without words or easy signals was an interesting challenge! It got me thinking about unconventional ways to communicate when things get hairy.
- Putting my mask back on after it got knocked off by a panicky buddy was pretty scary at first, but now it's a skill in my toolkit. You never know when it'll come in handy.
- Less is more - I'm keeping only the essentials within arm's reach and ditching the rest. Why drag around stuff I never use?
- Deploying the SMB (Submerged Menace Beacon?) has always been challenging for me, but Peter's tip about keeping it simple - less line and no personal attachment - makes total sense. Sometimes the best solutions are the simplest ones.

This course was a great opportunity to try some advanced skills in a controlled way and was great in building my confidence and competence.

Big shoutout to Peter Mosse & Jim Dyer for sharing their wisdom and helping me streamline my gear, and Stuart Cousins and Peter Walters for support in and out of the pool and keeping us well fed!





Diving Opportunities with VSAG

Our Network Expands

by Angus Stuart-Adams, Peter Galvin, Grant Callow and David Geeke

On the Labour Day Long weekend VSAG had a fantastic time at Allie Beckhurst's Queenscliff Boarfish lodge while some members stayed at Dave Geekie's new "ranch" at Bellbrae. At the same time and over Easter Peter Galvin (Galvo) put out the call for anyone interested in diving out of Inverloch. A few members

took up the invite and some stayed at Rowan Salger's house in Cape Patterson. Then over Easter Grant Callow and the Aquaholix crew had another successful (understatement) trip to Hogan's Island. (I suspect Aquaholix will be known as the Hogans boat despite attempts to christen it with "Aquaholix")

All of the above got me thinking about how fortunate we are to have these unique accommodation and diving opportunities. Not only do they provide diving opportunities but they also provide social opportunities within the club. Many of us have spent enjoyable stays at Galvos and the post dive BBQs are a big part of the fun. Dave Geekie has begun his own version of this at Bellbrae. As for the Hogans trips, I have only ever heard rave reviews.

Queenscliff and Bellbrae

Much of the club weekend diving activity centres around the Mornington peninsular areas of Sorrento and Blairgowrie or even Mornington itself. However, the March 2024 LWE diving based out of Queenscliff highlighted the resources developing on the western side of the bay.

Allie Beckhurst's location at Queenscliff provided a wonderful meeting place for both divers and boats to prepare for and washdown after a day's diving. It is particularly helpful that there is a vacant block next door that provides additional space for parking, sorting gear and even part drying gear on a fence after washing it in



VSAG Diving Opportunities cont.

front of Allie's Boarfish Lodge when it is not occupied. We are intending to store some spare gear at Allie's, including tanks that can be borrowed. Watch out for more announcements.

David Geekie downsized 12 months ago from a Melbourne townhouse to a 2880m² block at Bellbrae, near Torquay. This is around 50minutes drive from Queenscliff or only 25minutes from the Barwon River boat ramp that gives access to Chimney Rock, the J4 or the Ships Graveyard.

The house block has quite a large hardstand area as well as lawn area for car and boat storage. There is also a 12 x 12m shed that shelters Dire Straits as well as a Bauer compressor that can fill a 12L bottle in 20 - 30minutes. Some members have chosen to stay prior to or after diving and we are hoping that this will increase next season. The block is nicely landscaped as it contains a fire pit that has yet to be used for cooking crays. We still need to do some development to go anywhere near matching the hospitality at Inverloch but we have started the journey.



Phil Page is located in Ocean Grove with his boat Interlude and this has proven to be a real benefit as it is so much more comforting to have two boats going out together when exiting either the Rip at Lonsdale or the Barwon Bar.

Inverloch and Cape Paterson

For years now Galvo and Rowan Salger have hosted members at Inverloch and Cape Patterson. Galvo has quite a large house which can fit quite a few divers, he also has a good set up for cooking crays and washing and drying dive gear. Rowan can fit a smaller number of divers but also has a similar set up to Galvo's. The availability of Inverloch/Cape Paterson accommodation opens a significant area of the coast for us to dive. We typically launch from the following;

- Inverloch which provides access to many kilometres of reef extending West from Inverloch to several kilometres past Cape Paterson. There are some brilliant dive locations along here, including the Bunurong Marine Reserve. Inverloch also allows access to Arch Rock, to the East, which is almost to Cape Liptrap. Arch Rock has impressive limestone reef.
- Walkerville which provides access to the Wilsons Promontory islands when the conditions have been right. Wilsons Prom has some of the best diving in Victoria with "house sized" rocks, generally good visibility and abundant fish life.
- Newhaven which opens the southern coast of Philip Island, Kilcunda, the Pinnacles and the George Kermodé.

Hogan Island (and King Island)

"Hogans" is located about 80 km South East from our launch site at Port Welshpool into Bass Strait and approximately 40km before Deal Island. I have been going there for over 14 years and the 40th trip will be soon.

It is a crossing not to take lightly, Bass Strait changes fast and we have seen it at its best and worst. A normal trip takes about 2.5 hours we have had rough crossings of 5 hours. The rough trips are not pleasant and even in a large boat are not for the faint hearted. We always pay careful attention to the weather forecasts and we have called off many trips when the forecast deteriorates. Thankfully we are also able to get weather forecasts on the island. We also inform Welshpool Coast Guard of our plans.

I have had a 5 day trip turn into 12 days due to a weather front coming in early, that's the nature of remote diving.



VSAG Diving Opportunities cont.



We currently do the crossing in a 10m ex Coast Guard boat with twin 200 hp Suzuki 4 stroke engines, 400 litre fuel tank, radar, forward looking infra red, positive buoyant hull, wet deck, dual GPs navigation units, 27mg and VHF radio and a sealed cabin that will take 8 people. Average fuel consumption on the boat loaded on the trip out is 1.6 liters to the km

What we bring to the island: We also carry an extra 200 litres of fuel in jerry cans (600 litres in total), all food and water for a 5 day trip plus emergency provisions, dive compressor, dive gear x 6, camping and sleeping gear, clothes and 2 inflatable tenders. Literally a truck full of gear.

All gear is paddled to the shore in the inflatables and carried to the hut. Everyone finds a spot and sets up their own camp.

The hut was burnt down in 2012 and we transported material out over 2 years and rebuilt it in 2014. The hut

is open to all for refuge and is stocked with emergency food and water, not only by us but by other visitors as well. There are many entries in the log book, mainly kayakers who were very thankful for a place to sit out bad weather.

The trip is about good food, company and diving.

There are many island duties, tank pumping, water collection, cooking etc. which is shared by all.

The diving is spectacular, caves, swim through's and abundant fish life. Hogan Island is actually a large number of islands and bommies. Several kms offshore there are also three pinnacles that come up from 30+ meters to about ten meters. The boat dives are from 18 -40 m and from the shore around 10m. The currents between the islands can be strong so choosing the right site for the weather and tides is critical. The team has considerable experience diving at Hogans and this is crucial for a safe experience, we are a long way from help.

On all dives we have a live boat with 2 qualified skippers on board for diver pick up and all dives have a Hogan experienced lead. We have a remote diving procedure / guideline that we follow which includes comprehensive dive and separation plan. We have a diver briefing before each dive to ensure everyone knows the plan, including pick up and drop off. The boat carries 12 litres of oxygen, a defibrillator and has a fully stocked first aid kit. We always have first aid qualified people on board.

We buddy dive and solo diving is for the experienced photographers only when the location and conditions are suitable.

This is a club sightseeing dive trip and not for profit, we share the cost based on food and fuel prices and any other costs to make the trip happen.

So, the above seems to be a lot of effort, these trips are hardly relaxing but everyone who goes enjoys it immensely and we enjoy showing first timers the island. We really are lucky to have the boat, crew, gear and experience to do these trips and do them safely.

At the time of writing we are planning our first trip to King Island, will keep you posted.

Hope to see you on the next trip!





PHOTOGRAPHY

So Many Photos!

by *Peter Mosse*

Have you ever wondered what to do with all your underwater photographs? Have you ever wondered what will happen to your well-earned photographs when you leave our watery planet? And if you are like me and go back far enough, you may have also wondered what to do with all the 35 mm slides!

I had pondered these questions for some years. One day I was looking through some of my underwater books and decided why don't I make a photobook of my photos. With the new publishing capabilities and the internet, it is well and truly possible. And if I do say so myself, quite a few of my photos can compete with some other publications.

It was a long haul. First, I had to sort through my many 35mm slides and select those that I wanted to scan to digital. Then I had to scan them. A long tedious process. Then I had to sort through my digital photos

and decide which ones would make the cut. Then I had to decide which online product to use. There are quite a few. I spoke to couple of photographers and had a bit of a look on the net. A local photographic shop suggested having a look at Momento.

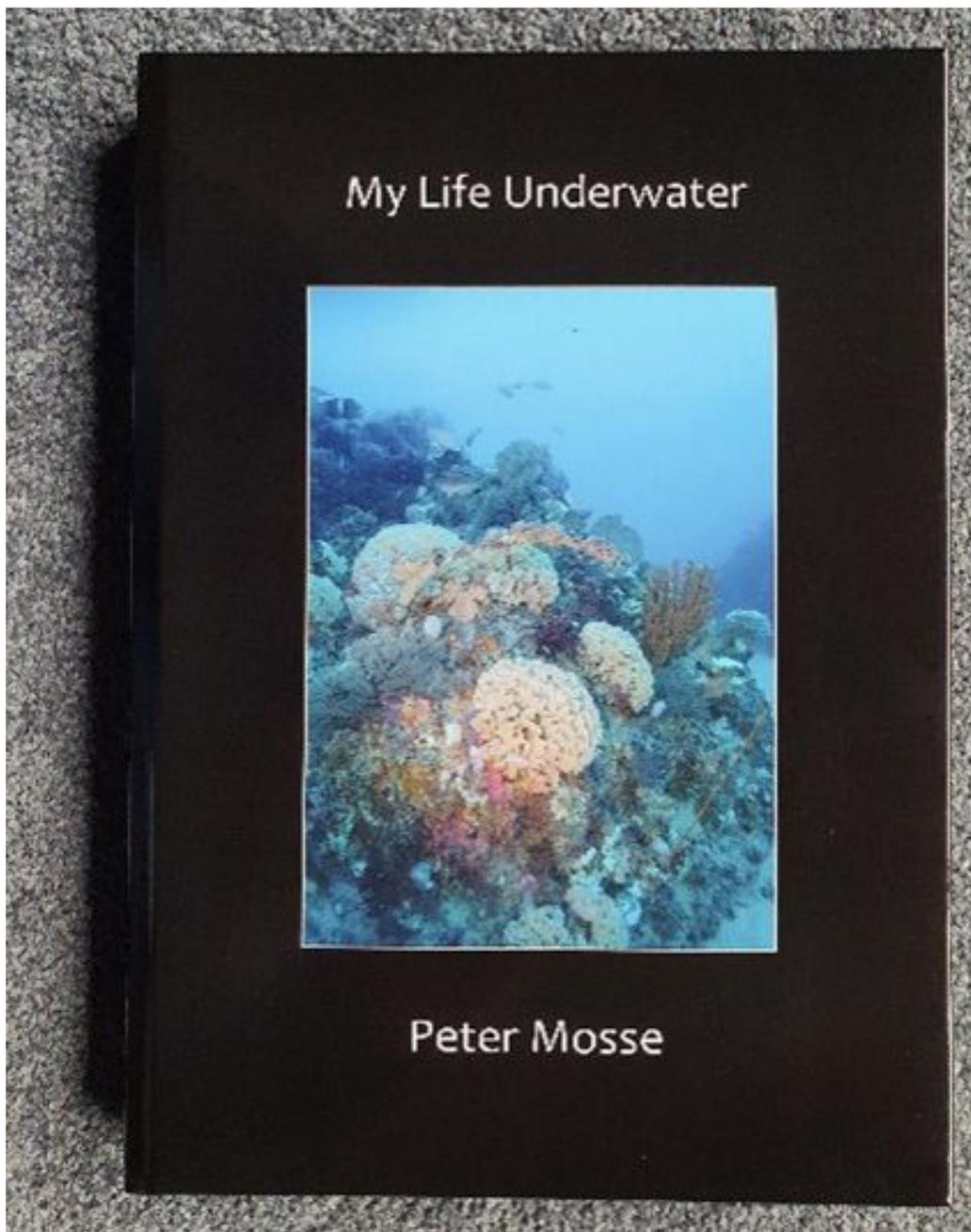
Momento is an all-Australian product and printed here. Once I had decided on using Momento and familiarized myself with the basic layout capabilities of the product (endless possibilities) I needed to design the overall layout of my photobook and then decide on individual page layouts from the hundreds that are possible in the software. I decided on a set of default layouts for 1, 2 and 4 photos per page and saved those as favorites.

Then came the choice of background and borders. I started off with mainly white background but basically every photo looked better with a black background and fine white border. It took a while to convince myself to use all black backgrounds but once set up there was no doubt. It was far better.

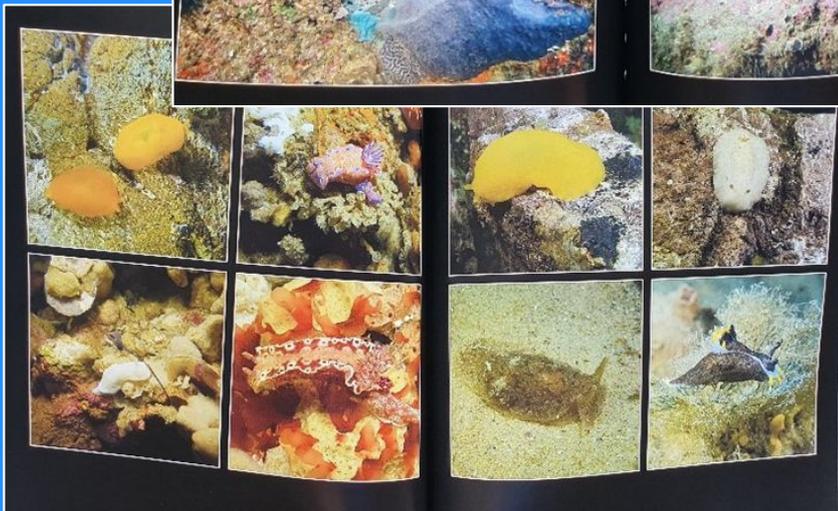
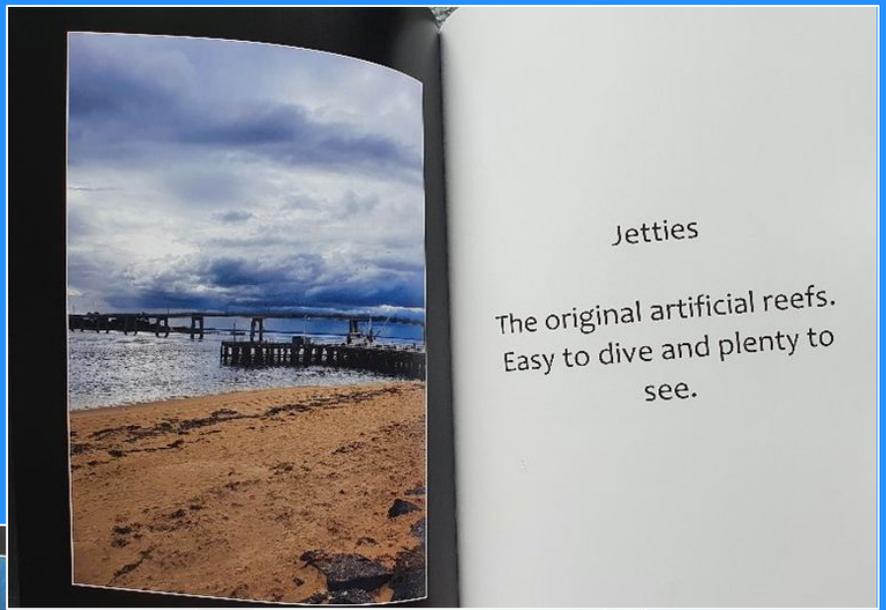
And if you want you can add text to photos or insert text boxes or pages.

It is quite hard to photograph the pages in the bound book, but the photos below should give you some idea of what can be done.

I ended up with the maximum number of pages (200) of high quality paper with an impressive quality hard cover which you can fully design yourself. And the price you ask. I purchased 5 copies that worked out at about \$1000. For about \$1 a page I feel it is excellent value for a lifelong memento of your photographs and one that can be passed down through the ages of family and possibly friends.



So Many Photos cont.



Page layouts used



Diving The Silent Anzac

by Ian Scholey

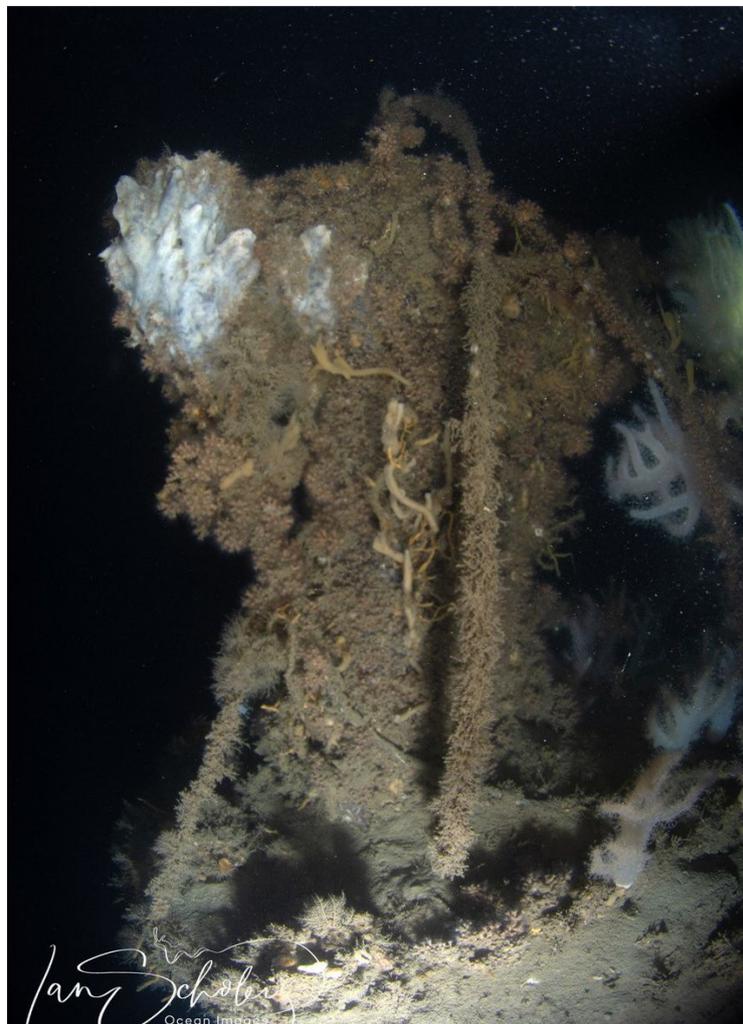
The battlefields of Gallipoli hold a special place in the hearts of both the Australian and Turkish peoples. The exploits of the troops on the beaches and hills are well known but the role played by the various navies is less so. The story of the Australian submarine AE2 is a compelling one and deserves more attention.

Operating as part of the British 2nd Submarine Squadron the AE2, under the command of Captain Henry Stoker and with a crew of 35 joined the assault on the Dardanelles. On 23 April 1915, three days before landings at Gallipoli, AE2 was ordered to penetrate the Dardanelles. Stoker was told to sink any minelayers he saw in the narrows and, as the landings were due at dawn the next day, to 'generally run amok'.

The Dardanelles are 59km in length and only 0.8km wide at the narrows of Çanakkale. The mission was extremely dangerous due to the minefields, submarine nets and shore-based guns protecting the straights. The danger was intensified further by the treacherous currents running through the strait. A British submarine HMS E15 had tried and failed on 17th April to pass through. E15 was caught in a violent eddy off Kepez Point and forced ashore. Its commander and 5 others were killed by a Turkish shell, and the rest of the crew was captured.

AE2 entered the straits at 2.15am on 25 April just as the men of the Anzac Corps approached the coast of Gallipoli. Given his order to run amok, Captain Stoker began the transit on the surface. With searchlights playing across the water the submarine edged forward until at 4.30am it was spotted. Immediately guns fired on her from 2km away forcing Stoker to dive. For the next 30 minutes the crew listened nervously as mine cables scraped the sides of the submarine.

At 6am, Stoker took the submarine up to periscope depth. By that time, Australian soldiers had been ashore on the other side of the peninsula for about an hour and a half. The submarine's periscope was soon spotted causing heavy fire to commence from shore positions



Diving The Silent Anzac cont.

either side of the narrows. Turkish gunboats and destroyers began to hunt for AE2.

Seeing a suitable target, the small Ottoman cruiser Peyk-i Şevket, Stoker fired a torpedo and managed to submerge just before the AE2 was rammed by an enemy destroyer. The cruiser was badly damaged. At this point AE2's presence became of some value to the Anzacs fighting kilometres away. An Ottoman battleship, which had been firing across the peninsula at the invasion fleet causing considerable disruption, sighted the submarine's periscope and was forced to cease its shelling and move rapidly away.

By this time AE2 was north of Çanakkale. Stoker took AE2 up again and discovered he was close inshore. Suddenly, the vessel ran aground directly under the guns of an Ottoman fort. Much of AE2's conning tower was showing above the surface. They were so close that Stoker could see the flashes from the enemy guns almost reaching his periscope. Luckily, the Turks were unable to depress their guns sufficiently to hit AE2 and other batteries were too far away for accurate shooting. However, Stoker and the crew spent an anxious four minutes while the submarine worked itself off the shore as shells fell all around them. They had now breached the narrows and Stoker set off to try and get away.

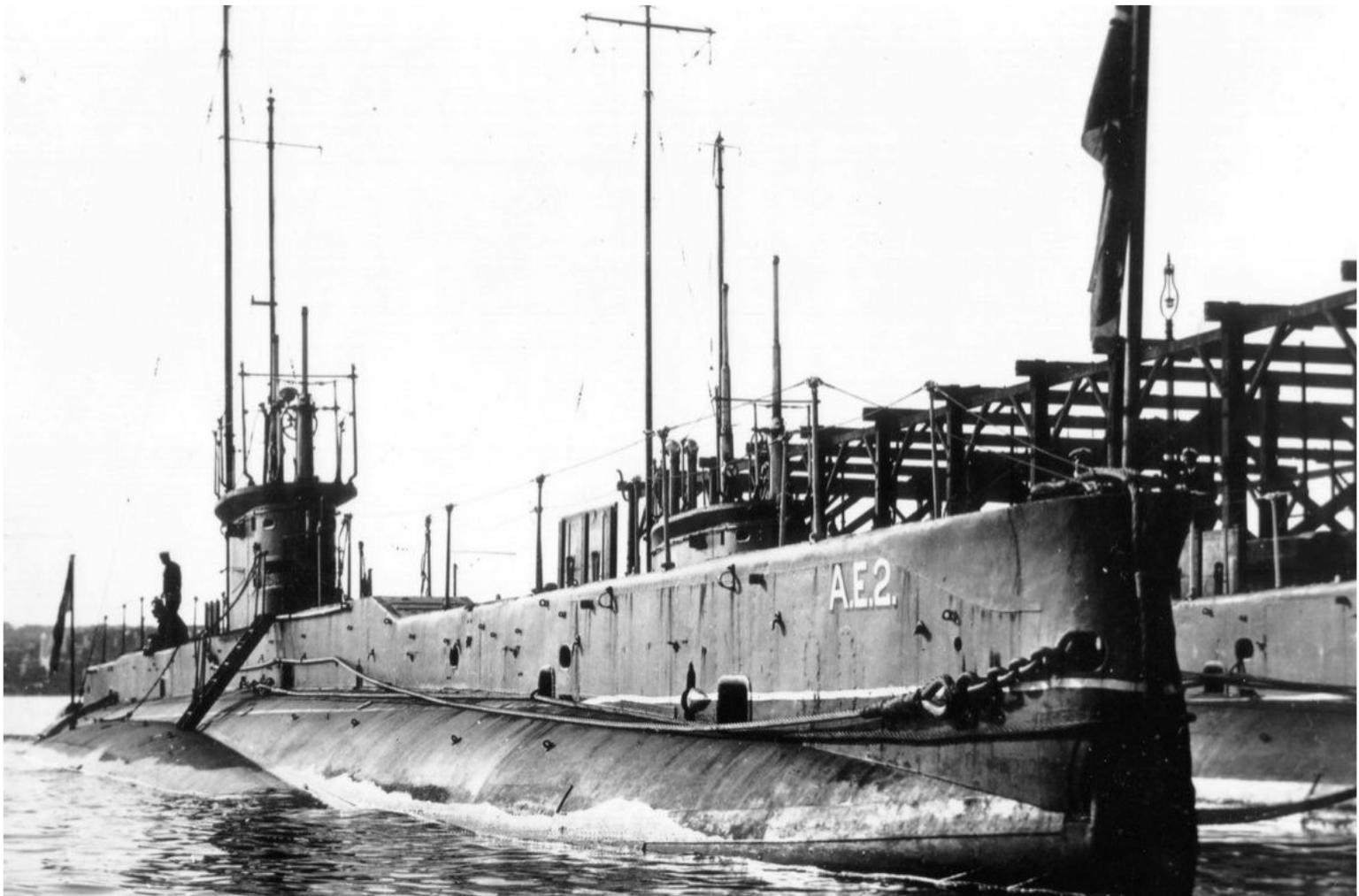
Tantalisingly close to escape a second grounding occurred when the water depth suddenly shallowed from 70 feet to just 8 feet. With Gun Boats and Destroyers aiming shells at the stranded submarine and intent on ramming her, Stoker was left with little



choice. Despite the risk that the submarine's propellers would be damaged he ordered full steam ahead. There was a shake, followed by some forward movement, a second shake and the submarine broke free into 30 feet of water.

Now approaching Nagara Point the last of the navigational challenges before the strait widened and navigation into the Sea of Marmara become easier the AE2 was still pursued by a fleet of Ottoman warships.

Stoker unable to shake off the pursuing ships made the decision to alter course and this time he headed towards the Asiatic shore where he knew the seabed banked slowly. With the engines at slow ahead he gently grounded the submarine. Here they remained for 16 hours while the Ottoman ships searched for her. Although there were many close shaves with the searching ships their luck held and eventually, they



Diving The Silent Anzac cont.

were able to proceed into the Sea of Marmara, surface, and signal to the fleet commander to report their success. The AE2 had become the first allied warship to make it through the Dardanelles.

Meanwhile on board the British battleship HMS Queen Elizabeth the commander of the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force had been awoken to receive a message from the commander of the Anzac corps. The message from Lieutenant-General William Birdwood stated that his generals, after the setbacks and chaos of the first day's fighting during which they had failed to take their objectives, recommended evacuation.

Hamilton was faced with an awful decision. As he considered his choices he was interrupted with another message, this time baring the news that AE2 had successfully passed through the Dardanelles into the Sea of Marmara. It is unclear whether the message changed Hamilton's decision, but it did frame his reply:

"There is nothing for it but to dig yourselves right in and stick it out. It would take at least two days to re-embark you as Admiral Thursby will explain to you. Meanwhile, the Australian submarine has got up through the narrows and has torpedoed a gun boat... you have got through the difficult business, now you have only to dig, dig, dig, until you are safe".

For the next four days the AE2 attacked Turkish shipping bound for the Gallipoli peninsula.

All the time she played cat and mouse with the Turkish warships hunting her. Her luck finally ran out on 30th April when she experienced a series of uncontrolled descents and ascents after hitting a dense layer of water at a bad angle. On her final ascent she was fatally damaged by the waiting Ottoman torpedo boat the Sulthanisar. With her pressure hull holed, Captain Stoker had little choice but to order his crew to abandon ship. The submarine was scuttled with



Captain Stoker being the last to leave her she sank to her final resting place 72m down. The crew were taken prisoner and spent the rest of the war in captivity.

The whereabouts of the wreck remained largely forgotten until 1996 when the then Australian Ambassador in Ankara, David Evans suggested to Turkish underwater explorer Selçuk Kolay that he search for the AE2. Mr Kolay, using sophisticated sonar and magnetometry apparatus, had been successful in the location of other wartime wrecks of significance in and around Turkey.

Selçuk Kolay started his search, and in June 1998, was rewarded with a sonar image of a wreck at 72 metres depth that did indeed fit that of an early E-Class submarine. A dive was made on the wreck which provided fairly conclusive evidence that the wreck was indeed the AE2. The finding of the wreck caused considerable excitement in both Turkey and Australia. A joint expedition to the wreck site was conducted in September 1998. The expedition further documented the wreck and brought back irrefutable evidence of its identity.



Diving The Silent Anzac cont.



There were early discussions between Australia and Turkey about the possibility of raising the submarine given its excellent condition. However, this was eventually ruled out and a decision was taken to preserve the wreck in situation.

A second expedition in 2007 achieved getting a camera inside the wreck through the partially open hatch.

A joint management plan was developed and resulted in a third expedition in 2014 where steps were implemented to preserve the wreck. A buoy was placed close to the wreck to prevent it being damaged by fishing boats and large sets of sacrificial anodes were attached to the bow, stern and conning tower to reduce corrosion. At this time a remote camera was again inserted into the hatch and managed to navigate the conning tower and enter the control room before traversing the submarine to explore more compartments. The footage from inside showed a spectacularly preserved interior. After filming was completed, the hatch was left open with a cover placed over the top of the conning tower to restore the original extent of access to the internal parts of the submarine. This expedition featured in the excellent ABC Catalyst edition titled the Silent Anzac.

The three expeditions excepted, diving on the wreck has been restricted by Turkey's stance on recreational diving which restricts diving to a maximum depth of 40m. In May 2022 at a meeting between the Australian Consul to Gallipoli, the Gallipoli Historic Site Directorate and Dr Andrew Viduka from Underwater Cultural Heritage an agreement was reached to facilitate introducing Australian technical dive operators to the new Gallipoli Historical Underwater Park, and to potentially undertake the first recreational technical dive on AE2 to inform the development of a new joint management plan. In June of this year, I was fortunate to visit Turkey with a small group of Australian Technical divers as part of this initiative.

We were invited to attend a conference organised by the Gallipoli Historical Site Directorate alongside the Australian Consulate Harry Hill, Andy Viduka and Dr Ian MacLeod the Former Executive Director, WA Museums Fremantle & Maritime Heritage at Western

Australian Museum and a member of the 2007 & 2014 expedition teams. The conference involved working sessions to start to explore what was required to allow recreational technical diving to be safely undertaken in Turkey while preserving the countries extensive Underwater Heritage.

As part of this initiative, we were invited together with a team of four Turkish technical divers to undertake dives on both the AE2 and HMS Triumph a WW1 British battleship also sunk during the Gallipoli campaign.

Ahead of the trip the planning had been extensive with permits secured, logistics arranged and equipment and breathing gases secured. The support from the Australian Consulate, Gallipoli Historical Site Directorate and the Turkish dive team was fantastic.

The Australian dive team arrived in Turkey on 3rd June and over the subsequent days we met the Turkish team members, tested gear and set up the boat for our dives. We were impressed with the level of support offered by the Gallipoli Historical Site Directorate who had arranged for shipping to be diverted on our dive days, arranged for a Hyperbaric Doctor to join the team and had arranged for fast boats and ambulances to be on standby should they be needed.

Our plan was to conduct one dive on HMS Triumph and two dives on AE2. After a successful dive on HMS Triumph, we were excited at the prospect of the dives on AE2. Unfortunately, our first dive on AE2 was a victim of the weather. With the weather forecasted to improve we waited until the afternoon of Friday 7th June to make our dive on the submarine. Knowing that we would now only have one chance at diving the wreck given its depth and our schedule we watched carefully as the wreck came into view on the sounder and the shot line was dropped. Our dive plan involved four groups of two divers entering the water in 20-minute intervals. Six divers dived rebreathers while two dived on open circuit.

Diving as part of team two I entered the water and we descended in relatively benign conditions with the water a little green, the current slight and water temperature of 19 degrees. Between 12 and 20m we encountered the Halocline that had caused issues for AE2. The Halocline is the area where warm water from the Black Sea mixes with colder hyper saline water from the Aegean which sits below it in the Sea of



Diving The Silent Anzac cont.

Marmara. The mixture caused our vision to blur as we descended through it. Immediately through the halocline we felt the chill as the water temperature dropped by six degrees. As we continued our descent the light quickly faded in the dense water. We were soon in complete darkness but for our torchlight.

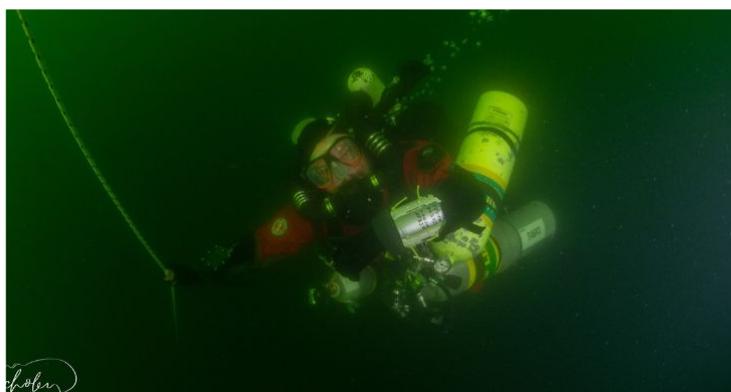
As we headed towards our planned depth of 72m the wreck of AE2 came into view. The shot was positioned close to the stern of the submarine. With a mixture of relief and elation that we were on the wreck we began our exploration. We swam slowly forward along the deck to the conning tower. The deck was relatively free of fishing line and nets and the wreck was remarkably well preserved. The closer we got to the conning tower the more marine growth was evident. Circling the conning tower, we made a careful examination of the hatch cover which was now covered in lush marine growth. Taking as many pictures as possible to provide information on the effectiveness of the previous preservation initiatives our time on the wreck passed quickly. Rather than making a complete transverse of the Submarine our limited bottom time and a necessity to ascend the shot line required us to turn around and return to the stern to begin our ascent.

Ascending in line with our decompression requirements we again crossed through the halocline, this time feeling the welcome benefit of the temperature change. Despite our planned intervals the dives teams inevitably bunched up as we

completed our stops. The current had increased and we were like flags hanging from the line. It wasn't the most comfortable experience but there were plenty of high fives and huge smiles once we were safely back on the boat.

Although the loss of our second dive on the submarine meant that we were unable to photograph the sacrificial anodes, used to cathodically protect the wreck, the film and photographs that we took gave a good insight into the effectiveness of the preservation measures in place. The dives were a great example of how teams of recreational divers can come together and provide useful input to wreck management plans.

I hope that the safe execution of the dives that we undertook and the input we were able to provide will support the initiative of GHSD to make the Gallipoli wrecks a world-renowned technical diving destination to rival the likes of Truk Lagoon and Scapa Flow. I for one can't wait to return.



TRIP REPORT

Christmas Island

by *Elodie Camprasse*

Red crabs migrating from the rainforest in their millions, covering roads and other man-made structures, on a mission to mate and letting nothing stop them on their way to the coast... this was the image I had in mind when James Chong offered VSAG members to join him on a dive trip to Christmas Island. He didn't have to say more, I was already sold. As a crab enthusiast, Christmas Island had been on my bucket list for as long as I can remember, and indeed the trip we took back in December last year was tremendously enjoyable, albeit very different to what I had anticipated...

We flew from Perth to Christmas Island, with a short stopover on Cocos (Keeling) Island, for a total journey of around 8 hours. On the island, we were greeted by our host, Nigel; we picked up a rental car and drove to our accommodation, right near the foreshore, in Flying Fish Cove, the main settlement on the island and started enjoying island life and a different pace straight away.

We began diving the next day, for a week, and I was impressed by the quality of the diving, and the professional service of David Watchorn and his team at Extra Divers. They always went out of their way to ensure we would have the best possible time and our dive guides, Toby and James were very friendly and knowledgeable. I have to admit that I don't do a lot of tropical diving these days, but I thought this was one of



Christmas Island, an Australian territory with a population of around 1,700 residents, is located in the warm waters of the Indian Ocean, about 1,500 km from Exmouth in Western Australia and almost 500 km from Jakarta. It is famous for phosphate mining and for its Immigration detention centre. Of course, what now attracts most tourists to the island is unique wildlife encounters, from red and other species of crabs, whale sharks and manta rays, and abundant birdlife. Staying on Christmas Island can be challenging and costly, with limited number of flights every week and sold-out accommodation if not booked early enough in high season, but I thought it was well worth the trouble!

Weeks before our group (James, Christine, who kindly organised most of the logistics, Matthias and I) was due to travel in the second week of December, I was watching the weather forecasts for Christmas Island, hoping it would finally start raining. Indeed, the red crab migration typically takes place in November-December, with the first substantial rain of the wet season. Alas, as we departed, except for a few night showers, no significant rain had been experienced on the island, and I have to admit, I started the trip slightly disappointed we might miss out on experiencing the red crab migration.

the most enjoyable trips I had experienced in tropical waters ever. The visibility was absolutely stunning, usually upwards of 40 m, and the water a very pleasant 29°C. We experienced small groups on the boat – often only a few divers or snorkellers joined us on our daily trips, and sometimes, it was just us. Each morning, we enjoyed double boat dives and got to discover different sites every time, on the Northern part of the island. In the afternoon, we went out to explore what the island had to offer on land – amazing coastal views from



Christmas Island cont.

lookouts scattered around the island, tropical rainforest, waterfalls, blowholes, conservation centres for birds and reptiles and more! If that wasn't enough, we also had the opportunity to do afternoon and night dives at the Flying Fish Cove jetty on a gorgeous 'house reef' with easy access, with the chance to explore shallow or deeper areas as the reef drops off quickly.

The Christmas Island Marine Park encompasses a vast area between the shoreline and 200 nautical miles from shore (except for the Northern part of the island). Healthy fringing reefs surrounding the island are home to abundant marine life. Christmas Island is the top of a seamount emerging from the depths of the Java trench. As such, just beyond the reefs, breathtaking, steep drop-offs delight divers with a taste for wall diving. Toby and James helped us spot a few different and iconic species every time. In terms of megafauna, we spotted white-tips sharks often, saw a few grey reef



sharks, giant trevallies, and green turtles, as well as mobula rays. What I was most impressed by, however, was the diversity, health and extent of hard corals, as well as the abundant and diverse fish life we encountered. I also enjoyed the thrill of night dives, and spotting some cool and unusual invertebrates at that time – from hermit crabs, to flower urchins, clams, other shellfishes, and more. Overall, the main highlights for



Christmas Island cont.



me included the following species: fire dartfish, longfin batfish, titan and clown triggerfish, leopard blenny, electric fileclam, Pacific peacock flounder, snowflake moray, marbled snake eel, dragon moray, ribbon eel, ornate ghost pipefish, rust-spotted guard crab, mover wrasse, longnose hawkfish and of course, the red crabs.

Despite the fact that the red crab migration hadn't started en masse, we still got to experience what we thought was a 'decent' number of them at the bottom of cliffs bordering some of the dive sites we explored, and we could snorkel in these areas for a closer look at the crabs on a couple of occasions. There are pros and cons to visiting Christmas Island during the red crab

migration. Cons include rougher weather and as a result, more difficult boat access and more limited choice of dive sites compared to what we experienced, lower visibility, road closures preventing visitors from enjoying the national parks including the lush rainforests inland. Pros include a chance to encounter big pelagics like manta rays and whale sharks, and of course, witnessing the incredible red crab migration in full swing. Some said we got the best of both worlds as we did get to see the crabs, we could explore the national park and different types of landscapes inland, and we experienced very clear and warm waters every day. I would still be keen to go back to the island during the crab migration to compare though!



PHOTO COMPETITION

Winner

January - 2024



Imogen Manins - Seahorse staringback - Blairgowrie

PHOTO COMPETITION

Winner

February 2023



Elodie Camprasse_Hogan's best kept secret_Hogan Island

PHOTO COMPETITION

Winner

March - 2023



Elodie Camprasse - Hogan's best kept secret - Hogan Islandi

PHOTO COMPETITION

Winner

April - General - 2023



Elodie Camprasse - Peek A Boo - Rye

PHOTO COMPETITION

Winner

April - Advanced - 2023



Corey Doughty - Hold still and he won't see us - Blairgowrie



Club Equipment

As a reminder to all, we have a range of club equipment for use by VSAG Club Members.

This includes Emergency Oxygen Administration and First Aid kits. These are typically provided on long-term loan to active Club boat owners and permanently located on their boats for the safety of Club Members.

Other equipment available for short-term loan includes:

- 2.8 litre pony bottles including 1st/2nd stage regs; redundant gas for deep or wreck diving
- Ambient carbon monoxide (CO) meter; for monitoring member's compressors.
- Automated External Defibrillator: with plans to increase the number of units over time
- Sand Launching Ropes

In addition, the Club owns a number of standard aluminum dive cylinders and a few smaller sized cylinders.

A full list of equipment available for loan by VSAG Club Members, and instructions on how to access this equipment, is available at the VSAG site: <https://www.revolutionise.com.au/vsag/vsag-equipment/>

For Club Members to access this equipment, the first point of contact is the Equipment Officer - Brian Heatherich.

The general email address to enquire about accessing of equipment is equipment@vsag.org.au.

The Equipment Officer will know the current location of pieces of equipment and can assist with arranging access. It is advised to make arrangements as far in advance as possible to ensure availability and sufficient time to collect the equipment.

For any further questions or requests, please contact Brian Heatherich.

Emergency Contact Information

Anywhere on Victorian Waters, your first response should always be to call

000

or call the Water Police on 1800 135 729

In the event you cannot place a call, use

VHF Channel 16

and follow the Radio Emergency Message Protocols shown below.

If all of the above fail, activate your

EPIRB

Radio Emergency Message Protocols

Ensure all vessel passengers are familiar with the operation of a VHF radio and the following process for placing a Mayday or Pan Pan call

Speak slowly and clearly

Mayday call

Vessel or an occupant is in grave and imminent danger and requires immediate assistance

Distress call

Mayday, Mayday, Mayday

this is

"Name of your vessel", "your call sign" x 3

Distress message after call has been acknowledged

Mayday

"Name of your vessel", "your call sign"

Vessel position (GPS, bearing, what3words)

Nature of distress and assistance required

Other useful information such as number of persons on board, vessel description, life-rafts, EPIRB, etc.

Pan Pan call

An urgent situation exists but there is no imminent danger

Urgency call

Pan Pan, Pan Pan, Pan Pan

All Stations x 3 (or *"specific station"* x 3)

"Name of your vessel", "your call sign" x 3

Urgency message after call has been acknowledged

Pan Pan

"Name of your vessel", "your call sign"

Vessel position (GPS, bearing, what3words)

Nature of distress and assistance required

Other useful information such as number of persons on board, vessel description, life-rafts, EPIRB, etc.

VSAG Committee & Club Roles 2023-2024

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editor@vsag.org.au

