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Registered at the General Post Office, Melbourne.
For Transmission by Post as a Periodical.

DEC 1970

FATHOMS



VICTORIAN SUB-AQUA GROUP

(Official Organ of the Victorian Sub-Aqua Group)

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CLUB MEETING - 16/12/70

The next meeting of the Group will be held on 16th DECEMBER, 1970 at the Victorian Association of Youth Clubs Hall, Gisborne Street, East Melbourne, opposite St. Patrick's Cathedral at 8.00 p.m. sharp. Meeting will terminate with General Business at 9.00 p.m. sharp and a discussion panel will be set up to answer any questions put forward by members.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

At the last meeting of the club, a motion was put to the members to change the meeting night from the third Friday in every month to the most popular night on a show of hands of members present.

This has been discussed at a committee meeting by the directors and it was decided to bring the thought to members by making a mention of it in "Fathoms". This was done on two occasions and a vote was taken on the 20th November, 1970.

It was decided by a majority of members present at this meeting to make the meeting night the third Wednesday in every month if available. On contacting V.Y.A.C. it was discovered that this night was free and the next meeting will be held on Wednesday, 16th December, 1970.

A fair amount of discussion took place before and after the vote on the pros and cons of the change but I feel that it is a step in the right direction to attract more members to attend meetings.

Friday is inconvenient for a number of reasons for many members, one of the major reasons it eats into the weekend if a member happens to be going away for the weekend. I feel also that it will attract more members to meetings as it is possible, in the middle of the week, to plan weekend boat trips and to get a good indication of who will be going and to make a firm booking for the boat.

Anyway, give the new night a try out and I'll see you all at the next meeting if I do not see you at the Club dinner beforehand.

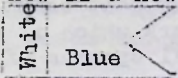
R. ADDISON - President

D O N ' T R E A D T H I S !

Well, seeing you are inquisitive and at the moment reading away merrily, take note that the CLUB MEETING - the last for 1970 - will be held on 16th DECEMBER - WEDNESDAY - at 8 p.m. Knowing you are all avid divers, how about patronising this meeting and showing us some faces we haven't seen for awhile. Drag, tear or rip yourself away from the idiot box and spare a night for the welfare of the club which you represent.

S. D. F. REPORT - MEETING. 5th NOVEMBER, 1970

There was quite some talk on safety rules. It was thought that all divers should wear a disc or tag around his neck with his address and/or phone number, plus his blood group.

The question as to which flag should be flown when diving was brought up again. Ian Thompson of Police & Rescue was present at the meeting, and he stated that there now is a new International flag since the end of 1969, which is regulation says that in Port Phillip waters the St. Andrews flag - red  but our boating and coastal background will be flown. So our advice to those who really wish to play it safe, fly them both. Two members from S.D.F., Grant Austin and Phil Webster attended a meeting of the Conservation Council, regarding the Esso Ethane pipe-line being placed under the bay. Phil Webster spoke explaining what the bottom of the bay is like, and how it is slowly being covered with mud from the Yarra, also how gradually the fish shoal made with old concrete pipes is being covered with silt and killing the life and growth which was there. He has offered the services of the S.D.F. for future consulting services regarding the bay. Phil will shortly be visiting Sydney where he will have a meeting with the Scuba Federation of Australia.

S.D.F. received a letter asking if we would be able to give a crash course of 5 days, 18th to 26th January, 1971, instructing S.C.U.B.A. at the Tally-Lo Boys' home. It was decided this was not a safe way, as all the aspects and skills of diving cannot be condensed and taught in such a short time, but we would be prepared to train in mask and flippers. Seven clubs attended the S.D.F. meeting.

LOOK, BUT DON'T TOUCH!

SCUBA divers have been coming under fire in N.S.W. for their suspected contribution to the decline in the number of fish on coastal waters.

Last year legislation was introduced under the Fisheries Act to stop scuba divers taking fish.

Now further controls are rumoured requiring all spearfishermen, including scuba divers, to register with the Underwater Spear

Fisherman's Association and pay a licence fee of 50c.

Western Australian spear fishermen have been setting out to kill the old image that they are "pelicans" - the derogatory spearfishing term for a skindiver who takes more fish than he needs and so gives the sport a bad name.

As a result, the West Australian Council of Underwater Activities has joined the State's Nature Conservation Council. Their major goal is to turn the east coast of Rottnest Island into one big marine national park which it says, will preserve four historic shipwrecks, several species of unique coral and colonies of small colourful reef fish.

The underwater men, however, expect opposition because such a park could interfere with fishing activities of launch fishermen in the same area.

T R A I N I N G

It is advisable that diving training be taught in the comfort of a swimming pool. Once the pupil has completed his swimming and primary tests (using mask, snorkel and flippers) in the training pool, he may commence aqualung training.

On completion of his pool training he may progress to open water, but he must dive under the supervision of an instructor.

Experience has shown that it requires numerous dives under varying conditions for divers to become thoroughly at home in the water with aqualung equipment, and capable of dealing in a cool and calm manner in most emergencies.

It is not particularly difficult for the average person who is physically fit and of reasonable swimming ability to learn to dive, but due to the hazards of the underwater environment it is essential to have competent instruction.

With the experience gained from the growth of underwater swimming, the following basic pattern of training has evolved - **TEST OF SWIMMING & WATERMANSHIP** - to ensure that prospective divers are reasonably competent in the water.

LECTURES ON DIVING THEORY - trainees should be briefed on what is ahead of them. Underwater swimming is not an activity that comes naturally, and a certain amount of knowledge and understanding is required if a person is to take part.

SNORKEL OR SKINDIVING TRAINING - to swim with mask, flippers and snorkel is the logical intermediate step between ordinary swimming and aqualung diving. It increases physical fitness, swimming ability, confidence and water discipline prior to aqualung diving. It also introduces the novice to some of the effects of water pressure, ear-clearing and the difference in vision due to refraction, and clearing the face-mask.

AQUALUNG TRAINING - the trainee should be medically fit. The instructor should remind the pupil of essential points as given in the lectures - the need to relax, the danger of holding breath on ascent, how to clear ears and counteract water-pressure on face-mask, the buoyancy check.

TRAINING DIVE IN OPEN WATER - prior to entering the water, all equipment should be checked.

Panic is a major hazard to divers, and this is often underestimated, especially with inexperienced divers. Even in the best planned dives, emergencies can and do occur, but the experienced diver will apply mental brakes to avoid panic and rectify the situation by taking the appropriate action for safety. This may not be the case with a trainee: even after much pool training, a few drops of water in the mask may cause him to dash to the surface, possibly holding his breath in an instinct of self-preservation, only to find he is then in even more trouble.

It may be possible in some sports to dispense with an instructor and by practice and experiment acquire some degree of proficiency but this is not so with diving, for a mishap underwater can cost a person his life. Diving training under the close supervision of a competent instructor is therefore necessary.

There are many aspects of diving which are unknown quantities and even the most experienced diver may find himself in circumstances from which he must be rescued. It follows that all training and diving must be carried out with the fullest safety precautions and no diver should ever dive alone.

NEWS Big OR Small LET THE ED. KNOW

Address and Phone number on page 3 of this edition.

E X P L O R A T I O N

There are some people who take up diving for a specific purpose, such as spearfishing, underwater photography, serious scientific investigation, or salvage for trophies or gain. The first approach of by far the greater number of sports divers, however, is for the thrill of exploring a new, alien and - from all reports they have probably received - fascinating world. In this they will not be disappointed.

DIVING FOR PLEASURE. The pleasures of diving are many-sided, as diverse as the feelings of those taking part, but as all derive from entry into a new environment they have first to be anticipated, experienced, assimilated and understood before they can become fully enjoyed.

Some aspects of enjoyment spring from the different-to-normal experiences that the human senses encounter underwater. Each time a diver sinks below the surface, his whole world changes. The light dims and colours fade as the sun's rays are rapidly absorbed by the water. Normal hearing ceases, to be replaced by the vague awareness that only comes from long familiarity with slight sounds whose direction cannot be located - sounds of sea creatures, stones rattling in the waves' thrust and surge, the gurgle of a demand valve. Taste and smell are virtually non-existent, while the feel of water is all encompassing. The surrounding water imposes its presence in many ways: its cold and wetness in direct contact with the skin; the increasing pressure as the diver descends; the weightlessness when properly neutral buoyant and the irritating, sometimes panicky, fight against it if grossly too light or too heavy.

The experienced diver who is at home in the water has learned to understand these once unaccustomed and frightening perversions of his senses. He has come to recognise the features of living underwater; the silence, the calm, the caress of the water, and its support for his weightladen body. No longer are his senses distressed. They have reawakened in a new world with a new set of values and expressions and they have engendered a self reliance, an awareness of things and their significance. The diver has become one with the underwater world and learned to love it.

On every dive, whether in the sea, rivers or quarries, whether the visibility be good or bad and the currents fast or slack, the experienced diver makes renewed contact with a world he has made, in part, his own. But there is one thing on every dive that stands out above all others. This is the sublime joy that comes at the instant of breaking surface. The shades of the underwater world are gone, light bursts in on the senses, hearing returns and the wonder, perhaps

awe, that compelled the emergence of creatures from the seas millions of years ago to make a life for themselves on the land is experienced.

The pleasure of diving are therefore two-fold: to explore and uncover the unknown, and then to return to the familiar with an added appreciation of its beauties.

DIVING ABILITY. In order that a diver may immerse himself in this new environment, and for a time become part of it, he must have previously rid himself of cares and worries about the functioning of his diving equipment, or of his personal ability to use it. Of course, the problems of diving and the fundamental need eventually to return to the surface to breathe when the air supply is exhausted can never be forgotten. What is required is a complete self assurance to the extent that the use of the aqualung and any actions underwater have become instinctive. Thought time and energy spent on the technicalities of diving are then reduced to a minimum, in consequence of which the diver can devote himself towards other ends.

The passport for entry into the underwater world are a knowledge of his equipment and the physical factors involved and with them the diver can make contact with his new environment. A broadening of his knowledge and an understanding of it will only come from personal experience and intelligent observation. It cannot be achieved otherwise, however extensively he may read about the subject or practise with his equipment in a swimming pool.

OBSERVATION. Especially underwater it is easy to look at something yet not to see it, or to see it yet not understand its significance or what it is because of the strangeness of its surroundings or its camouflage. Unless the diver makes a conscious effort at observation and identification, his dives will lack interest and become a series without variety. The art of intelligent observation needs to be required.

To set about this, look definitely at things as you come upon them and do not let your eye move idly from one thing to another as you fin along. Take note deliberately of the shape, size and colour of some facet of undersea life, plant, creature. Establish the circumstances surrounding it, whether it is among rocks, on sandy sea bed, or in open water, hidden in dark holes or beneath overhanging ledges, its depth and movement or any other feature peculiar to it.

Give it a name if you can as this is a sure way of fixing in your mind what you have seen. You can also discuss it sensibly afterwards with other people. If you do not know what it is you have seen, remember its characteristic features so that you can find out what it was after the dive by asking another diver or by using

books of reference, invaluable for such occasions.

There are so many new things to be seen underwater that, for the beginner, it is an advantage to set out on a dive looking for one or a few specific things - the amount of seaweed, the type of rocks or the number of crabs - to the exclusion of all else. This will avoid becoming overwhelmed with too great a number and variety of facts to carry in the mind. In making a diver in a familiar area, remember previous dives there and look out especially for similar conditions and specific differences. This quickly builds up experience in knowing what to expect and a keen observation of anything unusual, which may well be of particular interest. When diving in the same place a number of times, you can get to know not only the shape of the sea bed, the location of rocks, gullies and patches of seaweed, but also the creatures living in the area, sea anemones, crabs and even individual fish. Then you know that place underwater and can return to it with a friendly familiarity just as you would if visiting again the fields, woods or village on a country walk that you have made sometime previously.

Never forget a dive the moment you have finished it. Go over it in your mind at leisure when you have returned home. Picture the underwater scene, recall the significant things, try to account for the unexpected happenings. The more you ponder on it the more you will be able to resolve and learn.

The one outstanding advantage that a diver has is to see plants and creatures in their natural surroundings. Much can be learnt by careful study of fish in an aquarium, just as from animals in a zoo, but in both cases the environment is unnatural and the creatures' actions and reactions are quite likely to be radically different from those of wild life. Ecology is the study of creatures in their natural surroundings, and this is the one thing that divers alone can do in the underwater world as they become part of it themselves.

The greatest satisfaction can be obtained from a dive if such a study is carried out. Observe how plants and animals live, their interdependence one upon another, where they grow or are to be found: the effects of different types of sea bed, rocks or flat bottoms; why some areas are empty and devoid of life - all intricate and fascinating aspects of under-sea life. The genuine explorer goes out from the normal world to bring back and record sights and experiences from an unknown or unfamiliar one. To seek the pleasures of underwater exploration is truly an end in itself.

THE SEASCAPE. The first time that a novice diver glances through a reference book on undersea life, he may well become confused at

the welter of different forms of species. These books are invaluable later on in diving, but it is a great help to know a few of the more common plants and animals that a diver may expect to see in his home waters. In Victorian waters the exotic shaped and coloured creatures of the tropical seas are not to be found, but nevertheless there is a profusion of varieties and an abundance of life not to be found in many other coastal waters anywhere in the world.

Plant life is limited to the depth to which the sun's light can penetrate. The most significant seaweed is kelp, which spreads its broad fronds outwards from the top of a thick stem as much as six feet tall. Below 40 feet there is usually very little plant life to be seen.

An interesting seaweed is called *CYANDRUS CRISPUS*. This is a common brown weed only a few inches long growing on rocks near to the surface. When the sun's light strikes the bunching tips of its new shoots, it causes them to glow with a blue iridescence which vanishes quickly when the plant dies if it is picked from its hold-fast on the rock and removed from the water. To see this below water is a good example of the advantage a diver has over his land-based fellows.

It is often difficult for a diver to recognise the difference between animal and plant as many animals give up the life of free movement and fix themselves, at least for some stage of their development, to a rock, seaweed or sea bed.

Unlike seaweeds, animals are to be found in the sea at any depth because they feed either off the weed or off one another. Thus, anything below 40 feet, although fixed to a rock and looking very much like a plant or flower, is more likely than not a member of the animal kingdom. Common among these are the sea anemones, of which there are many varieties found from the surface downwards. All of them have tentacles which wave around attempting to catch food which they pass to the mouth in their centre.

Other normally-fixed creatures are the shell fish. A diver will see many varieties of these, the most common type depending largely on the area in which he is diving.

Prominent among the legged animals are the many varieties of crab, including the edible one, the spider crab and the little hermit, scurrying over the sea bed in his borrowed shell which he uses to protect his soft body. Also noticeable because of their distinctive features are the lobsters usually found hiding in a well chosen rock hole.

Starfish and sea urchins walk slowly on a multitude of tiny suckers. There are many varieties of each, but the starfish can be recognised by the radial arms and the sea urchins by their