

# Fathoms

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

**SUMMER 22-23**



*2022 VSAG Photo of the Year - Matthijs Smith - Lightshow - Blairgowrie*

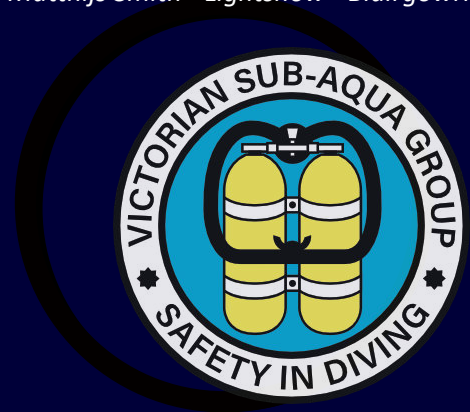
*QLD/NSW Road Trip*

*The Fathoms Journey*

*The Richard (Dick) Charles Safety Belt*

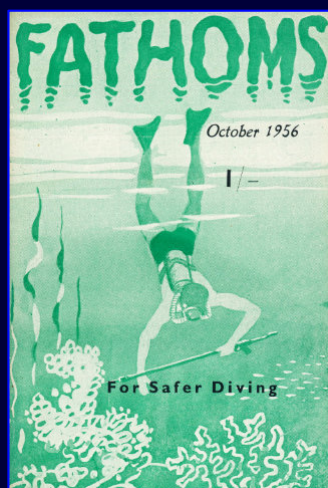
*OZTek / OZDive Show*

*If You Suspect Something Is Wrong....*



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# President's Wrap Up - AGM 2022

By Matthijs Smith



Many thanks to those who joined the 2022 VSAG Annual General Meeting last night. It was a great meeting, great to catch up and see everyone. It also provided a great opportunity to reflect on the diversity of Club activities and experiences throughout the year as well as see how we have grown in the past year.

First, I would like to congratulate the winners of the VSAG awards this year. **Peter Matthews** is the well-deserved recipient of the 2022 Fathoms Award for his unbelievable work in collating the Club's history and records. This is the most extraordinary resource which covers the Club from its establishment through to the early 70s. This has been a monumental effort and one which Club members will benefit from for as long as the Club continues to exist.

Second, **Carole Campisano & Peter Mosse** received the Literary Awards for their excellent contributions to Fathoms. Carole getting every one excited about her favourite dive site at Ningaloo, and Peter keeping everyone on the edge of their seats with his tale of being rescued at Wilsons Prom thanks to his EPIRB.

As mentioned at the Meeting, Fathoms is an enduring and fundamental part of VSAG and this has been further highlighted by the value of the work that Peter Matthews has done in preserving the Club's history and stories. Fathoms is the Club's journal and magazine and it is also somewhere that everyone in the Club is able to make a valuable contribution - even a brief dive report, an article of interest, some knowledge you have, or an experience or story you want to share with the Club. It all is valuable. However, we have seen a declining interest from Club members to provide content. We are fortunate that, for the time being, this has been offset by a few members making a big effort to maintain the content of Fathoms. However, Fathoms is not the responsibility of a few individuals and if this continues, Fathoms will suffer and decline. This is the Club magazine, for the Club, by the Club. We are moving to a publication schedule that will be driven by the volume content we have received from Club Members. If we get a low number of contributions from Members, the time between publications could end up being quite substantial. Please reflect and act.

Finally, a massive congratulations to **Peter Beaumont** as runner up, and **Ian Scholey** as the 2022 VSAG Club Member of the Year. Peter has been incredibly

generous taking divers out for all sorts of adventures in the Bay and beyond throughout the year and I think has done more checkout dives than any of the Committee Members. Ian continues to keep the activities of the Club on "11", organising a variety of dive trips— local, overseas, and road trips—and bringing an incredible diversity of activities to the Club. The value and contribution of these Club members is without question and their recognition in this year's awards is well deserved.

In terms of the Committee, I would like to extend the Committee's heartfelt thanks to **Peter Campisano** and **Jeremy van der Beek** for their great contribution over the last few years. And I would also like to welcome our new Committee Members for 2022/23: **Elliott English, Andrew McKernan, Tara-Maree Lynch** and **Michele Braid**. With the continuing Members, we now have 12 on the Committee which I think makes it an absolute tour de force.

I believe that, as a Club, we have been exceptionally lucky to have such a constructive and proactive Committee for the last couple of years. I think the energy and calibre of our new members means that we are about to see this go up to the next level.

However, while the Committee Members have put their hands up to be actively involved in shaping and energising the Club, it should not be the sole source of activities in the Club—every Member is able to contribute. Probably one of the the most satisfying things over the last year has been seeing non Committee Members organise different activities. A few that spring to mind are:

**James Chong** - organising the Kalinda liveaboard trip;

**Claudio Pluchino** - organising boat licence and radio training for Club members;

**Peter Galvin** - running the VSAG Inverloch dive operation and doing a deep dive into our insurance arrangements;

**Peter Beaumont** - taking Club divers out for boat dives more weeks than not;

**Peter Mosse** - organising a range of dive/picnic events, training and content for Fathom etc.

....all incredible contributions and apologies for anyone I have not included in this list. But this is why the Club exists and what makes being a Member of VSAG so worth while.

I really hope this keeps happening. In the words of John F. Kennedy (slightly modified):

"Ask not what your dive club and do for you, but what you can do for your dive club."

Looking forward to another exciting year ahead for VSAG.

Matthijs Smith - VSAG President (departing)



# EQUIPMENT

## Getting Back in the Water

- by Peter Mosse

In any group of divers there will be those that dive all year round, but also those who hang up their gear in April/May and do not get it out again until November/December.

So if you belong to the latter group, take some time to get ready to dive again, and make those first few dives simple ones. Here are a few checks you should make before your first dive.

### Dive Equipment

#### Regulators and Tanks

- Check your tank(s) are in test.
- Check the O-ring, is it perished or cracked? Are there thin bits of rubber “peeling off” from the O-ring? If in doubt, replace it, but make sure it is the correct size! If you are unsure of the correct size, visit a dive shop and buy several, and keep a stock of spares.
- Attach the regulator to the tank and slowly turn the tank on. Make sure you place your hand over the top of the tank and first stage of the regulator, and make sure the SPG is facing away from your face.
- Check for spiders or other insects in your second stages. Give the regs a good shake.
- Purge both second stages in air and water.
- Are either of the diaphragms sticking?
- Are either free flowing?
- Check both mouth pieces for cracks or perished material.
- Take a few breaths. Do they both breathe freely?
- Spray soapy water over the first stage and look for bubbles. If you see them, remove the regulator and reseal it. If the leaks continue, have the regulator serviced.
- Leave the regulator on the tank and the tank turned on for several hours. Does it hold pressure? If not, that suggests a leak that should be located. If it only deflates very slowly that is OK. A slow leak could also suggest a leak from the tank valve O-ring but that should have been detected with the soapy water. There may of course be leaks from the O-rings attached to the individual regulator hoses.

#### Buoyancy Compensators

- Shake out the inflation mouth piece.
- Inflate and deflate the BCD manually. Is the button sticking or does it depress and release smoothly?

- Attach the SCUBA feed. Does it fit on and off easily? Inflate the BCD. Does the button depress and fully release easily or is it sticking? Any problems, get them seen to at a dive shop or SCUBA service business. You definitely don't want the SCUBA feed to stick underwater!
- Check you can “pop” the SCUBA feed off using one hand only.
- Fully inflate the vest and leave it for several hours. Check that it has not deflated. If it does, there is a leak somewhere. Immerse the BCD and inflation hose in water and look for leaks or use the soapy water spray again.

#### Wetsuit or Drysuit

- Check for spiders. I recently picked up my wetsuit jacket from hanging over my boat and put my arm into the sleeve . Quite a surprise when my hand met with a large huntsman spider. And my jacket had only been drying for about a week since the last time I dived.
- Check the suit still fits and the zips and Velcro still work.

#### You the Diver

Perhaps you have dropped in fitness over the winter period and maybe put on a little weight. It has been quite a long, wet and cold winter.

Remember, when everything goes right, diving is easy and not very physically demanding, BUT when things go wrong, it can be very demanding. So check your fitness level and do some sort of activity to bring your fitness levels up.

- Regular strenuous walking.
- Fin swimming in a pool.
- Exercise classes.
- Running, cycling, swimming.
- Assemble your gear and put it on. Make sure the “muscle memory” gets it right. Do you automatically know which way to fit the regulator to the tank? Is the BCD inflator hose in the correct position?

#### Covid Reminder

And if you have had Covid in the last few months, be even more careful. Remember Covid affects your lungs, and we need them to be functioning well while diving.



## Check List

Why not print this article off and use it to tick off when you have completed the checks.

## Back in the Water

Take the time to do a couple of easy dives in favourable conditions first. Just get the feel of diving again. Make sure you feel comfortable before heading off to one of your favourite deeper or current prone dive sites. And gradually work up to deeper more demanding dives.

Once you get in the water, have your buddy check what you look like. Try not to look like the divers in the photographs below. Matthijs enjoys sending me horror pictures of divers he sees on the internet. Have a look at the photos. Can you see what is wrong?

**Hint: Remove all danglies, and make sure all long hoses are controlled and not forming long loops that can catch on things.**

And Finally...enjoy you diving season.



## DIVING HISTORY

# The Richard (Dick) Charles Safety Belt

- By Des Williams

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 Spear Fishermen's Association (USFA) and immediately began promoting the sport around the country. And it grew rapidly indeed.

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 89 mph. He then moved into manufacturing caravans and produced Australia's first "pop-top" unit and took out a Patent.



Figure 1. Dick Charles with his diver's safety belt.

During WW2, he produced a special patient stretcher-pulley apparatus which was used to carry injured soldiers in New Guinea. It was later used 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 Spear Fishermen's Association (USFA) was formed. 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.



Figure 2. An early US Divers Safety Vest. The oral inflator is visible on the left. The CO2 cylinder is situated lower right at the back out of sight. The emergency pull cord is visible at the lower right of the vest.





### "NAVY" DEPTH GAUGE

The Diaphragm Controlled Mechanism is protected from the corrosive effect of sea water. Its amazing accuracy gives closer readings than any competitive depth gauge. A luminous, radium dial insures easy reading in dark water. Shock resistant - unbreakable lens — guaranteed leakproof to 250 feet.

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Pressure tested to a depth of 200 feet, the "CALYPSO" is an accurate, Bourdon tube gauge, guaranteed leakproof. Each gauge individually pressure tested before shipping. Easy reading dial. Extra long "Tropi-Strap" for wrist.

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### BATHOMETER DEPTH GAUGE

A 100-ft. easy-reading gauge with no moving parts. Beautifully designed—long lasting translucent plastic.

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### NEW! "AQUA-FLOAT"

#### FOR EXTRA DIVING SAFETY AND CONVENIENCE

Comfortable, convenient, tough and practical, the "AQUA-FLOAT" is the perfect diver's emergency and depth compensating float. Every feature is designed for quick, convenient operation under extreme emergency conditions VULCANIZED SEAMS, BOUND FOR EXTRA STRENGTH.

- ★ Tough, rubberized nylon material for durability.
- ★ Large, screw-in 16 gram CO<sub>2</sub> cartridges for extra buoyancy any depth.
- ★ Fool proof, leak proof firing mechanism for easy accessibility.
- ★ Push open-oral inflator—Opens easily with cold or gloved hands. Closes automatically.
- ★ Zipper pocket cover to protect firing mechanism and for extra cartridge storage.
- ★ Contour neck design holds unconscious person face above water.
- ★ Zipper front entry.
- ★ Color—Safety Yellow.



7253 "AQUA-FLOAT" ..... \$22.95

7253-02 16 GRAM CO<sub>2</sub> CARTRIDGE ..... \$ .75

### U. S. DIVERS FLOAT

The U. S. Divers float is ideal for "Aqua-Lung" diving. A CO<sub>2</sub> cartridge gives instant emergency inflation, or the float can be inflated by mouth for effortless surface swimming with an empty tank. Designed to hold an unconscious person's head above the surface. May also be used to float a heavy sack or swimmer back to the boat.

Bright yellow for great visibility, neoprene impregnated nylon with triple bonded seams for extra durability.

7249 U. S. DIVERS FLOAT ..... \$13.95

7249-04 CO<sub>2</sub> CARTRIDGE ..... .55



Figure 3. 1964 US Divers Catalogue. Note the prices.

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 flotation belt worn like a cummerbund (Figure 1).

Today, all scuba divers wear a buoyancy compensator, but this device was a much smaller unit, to be inflated by a CO<sub>2</sub> 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/- (\$7.80) which would be approximately \$120 today. Designed primarily as an emergency flotation device, it was marketed as suitable for divers and anglers alike. A pull on the trigger would allow the CO<sub>2</sub> canister to inflate the belt

in 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 the number increased.

US Divers produced an early Safety Vest or Buoyancy Vest that could be inflated orally but also by a CO<sub>2</sub> cartridge in an emergency (Figures 2 & 3). Most of these CO<sub>2</sub> cartridge trigger devices very quickly rusted up, so were not reliable, probably why that feature was removed later in the 1980/90s.

Despite the introduction the Dick Charles Safety Belt in the 1950s, the concept of a safety flotation device for divers was curiously, almost totally ignored during the 1960s, even as interest in Australian sport scuba diving grew. During this period, very few divers actually wore a buoyancy vest of any kind and those who did so, seemed to favour the FENZY inflatable vest (Figures 4 and 5).



The FENZY consisted of a bright orange inflatable horse collar that could be inflated by mouth or by using a small compressed air bottle situated at the bottom and behind the horse collar. The small bottle could be refilled from a full SCUBA cylinder. This small cylinder was supposed to be hydrostatically tested in the same way SCUBA cylinders were, but all too often they weren't, making the filling process a bit like Russian roulette. Of course, if the FENZY inflation bottle was left open after it was empty, some salt water could enter and corrode the inside. So they WERE potential bombs, unless tested regularly.

A neat trick that was taught in advanced diving courses was to use the FENZY bottle as an emergency air source, allowing the diver to breathe from the oral inflator at the same time a small amount of air was bled into the vest from the bottle, all the while maintaining buoyancy. It wasn't easy. Incredibly, the idea of a buoyancy compensator vest for divers was mooted way back in the 1830s, yes,

approximately 190 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 (Figure 6 ). Unfortunately,



Figure 4. The FENZY in use in the chasm at Piccaninnie Ponds Mt Gambier in "the early days".

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!



Figure 5. VSAG divers Paul and Tony Tipping in FENZY vests at Apollo Bay in the 1983.

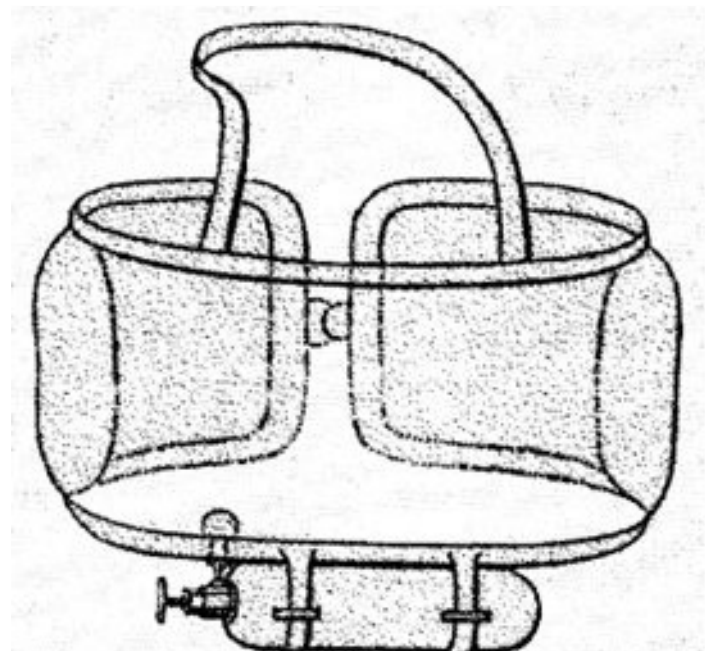


Figure 6. Thornthwaites inflatable vest, circa 1838.



**BOOK REVIEW** by Arthur Kokkinos

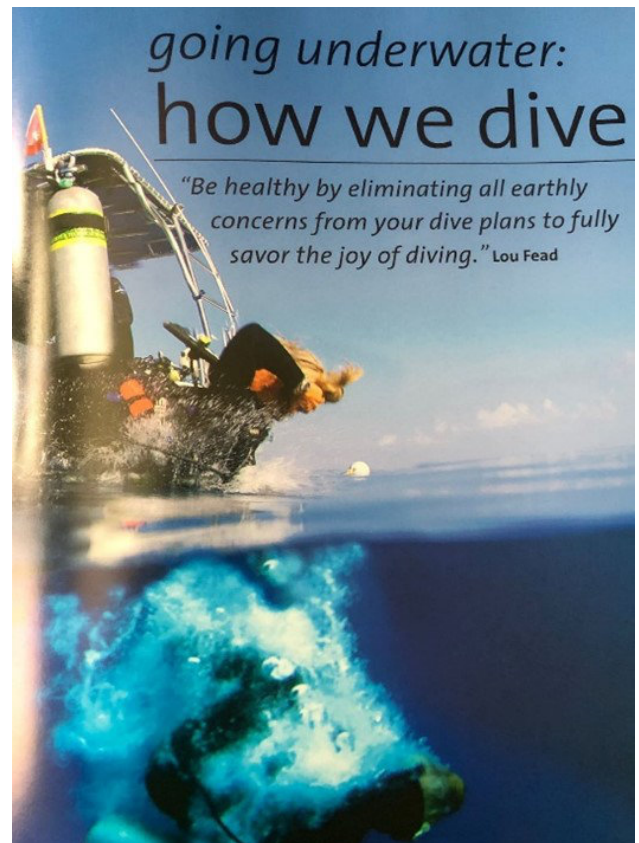
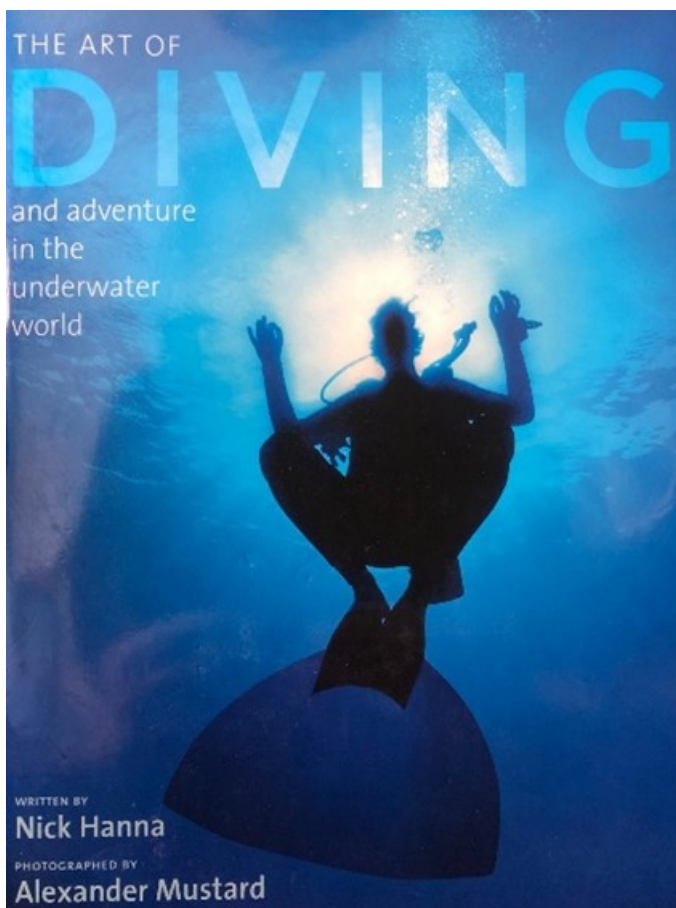
# The Art of Diving

- written by Nick Hanna

In the introduction of this magnificent book there was a small sentence that precisely summed up my feelings towards diving. "Diving conveys you effortlessly into another dimension, a liquid world of fabulous habitats and bizarre creatures whose magnetic allure draws you back again and again." How, can I not read this book from cover to cover. First released in 2008 and still circulating, this book does not fail to impress. Written by Nick Hanna and photographed by Award-winning photographer Dr Alexander Mustard, The Art of Diving manages to capture the soul of scuba diving. It explores the emotional and sensual dimensions to diving, captivating you with every page. As you immerse yourself deep into the book, the imagery and sensation of our underwater world comes to life.

This book is brilliantly put together covering many topics. Underwater landscapes, including reefs, underwater caves, and wrecks. Diving technique, such as perfecting buoyancy control. The art of fish watching. Making the most of meetings with remarkable and strange creatures. Underwater photography. Free diving. Holistic and spiritual scuba diving. And, the health of our oceans. With so many topics covered in one book, The Art of Diving sets a new standard in scuba diving books. Locations covered in this book include the Caribbean, The Red Sea, the Maldives, Thailand and Indonesia.

The in-depth analysis and advice are well researched and explained. The photographic imagery is well



proportioned and evenly spread within the text. As I kept reading this book, I found it hard to put it down. What really impressed me when reading this book was the different and unusual topics covered such as Holistic diving, conservation diving and the spirit of the oceans. These topics definitely open up your mind to a new diving perspective and gets you thinking in many other areas that are connected to diving that you never thought existed.

Overall, The Art of Diving is a comprehensive diving book that is easy to read and absorb. For those of you who skip through pages just for the photos, you also will not be disappointed. I love this book immensely. Do yourself a huge favour and get yourselves a copy.

My book review rating for this book is 11/10.

Remember, if you're not diving, dive into a dive book!!!

Until next time,

Arthur Kokkinos



# DIVING INDUSTRY EVENTS

## OZTek / OZDive Show

- By Arthur Kokkinos



I was one of the lucky ones who was chosen to volunteer at this year's OZTek Dive show held at the Melbourne Convention & Exhibition Centre on Saturday 1st of October and Sunday 2nd of October. Thanks to Brian Heatherich who sent out an email on behalf of the La Trobe University Dive club who were asking for volunteers to help out with the running of the show. I was rostered for 4 hours on both days of the show, checking tickets at the entrance of the main Theatre and on day 2 checking tickets at the smaller theatre.

All volunteers were given an All-Access Pass for both days. I was fortunate enough to attend a number of presentations from key note speakers and experience the show for 2 full days. I met many dive industry representatives and spoke with numerous intellectuals who were willing to give a presentation at one of our monthly VSAG meetings.

The OZTEK OZ Dive Show had 3 theatres for major presentations by guest speakers and 2 large rooms for workshops, training and smaller presentations. There were a total of 50 keynote speakers covering 43 different topics all related to diving. The show was full of information covering dive gear, dive travel, dive experiences, technical diving, cave diving and recreational diving. There were experts displaying and providing workshops on underwater photography and all aspects of dive safety. There was lots to see and many experts to get advice, opinions and knowledge.

### Day 1

I eventually signed in with all the other volunteers (13 in total). We were then given instructions on what to do. Our duties were to man all the entrances to the main theatres and check the passes of every guest and to make sure that they had the appropriate pass. Once our 4-hour shift was finished we were free to roam the show and attend as many presentations as we wished.



Craig Challen with Arthur Kokkinos



I was lucky enough to attend presentations.

1. CSI Underwater by Bobby Chacon (Retired FBI Agent). This presentation was fascinating and full of vivid information regarding the day-to-day operations of the FBI dive unit. Bobby recalled details from past cases he attended and was not afraid to bring up some of the gruesome details connected to these cases.
2. Panel discussion: The future of cave exploration: The rise of the machines. The panel consisted of 4 prominent guests Bill Stone, Simon-Mitchell, Graig Challen and Jean-Pierre "JP" Imbert.

In between presentations I was lucky enough to explore the many exhibitors on show. Over the 2 days I visited every exhibitor and tried to absorb as much information as I possibly could.

## Day 2

On Day 2 of the show, I was rostered on the afternoon shift from 1pm to 5 pm. I arrived early so I could further explore the show by visiting some more exhibitors and checking out the photo competition. The photos on display were categorised into different sections and all of them were impressive. I was also able to attend a presentation by Bill Stone speaking about Recent Advances in Autonomous Unmanned Cave Diving. This presentation was quite fascinating, covering futuristic cave diving exploration with advanced technology such as robotics, drones and computers.

At 1 pm I was on duty manning the both courtyard rooms for entrance passes with James Cho, a fellow VSAG member and I was lucky enough to attend three presentations. Richard Fitzpatrick speaking about Behind the Lens. The stories behind the filming of Attenborough, National Geographic and Discovery specials. A presentation by Xavier Vrijdag speaking about measuring Gas Narcosis in Divers and a presentation by Deborah Johnston taking an Historical look at Potholing and the Beginning of Cave Diving in days of old.

The highlights of the OZTek Advanced Diving Conference and Exhibition were many, but to name a few I must mention the following:

1. Listening to Richard Fitzpatrick speaking about his experiences in making documentaries was jaw dropping.



*Filmmaker Richard Fitzpatrick with Arthur Kokkinos*

2. Experiencing a cave dive through virtual reality goggles was trull amazing. Presented by the CDAA (Cave Divers Association of Australia).
3. Viewing all the photos from the OZ TEK Photographic competition. Some of the photos were out of this world.
4. Speaking to many of the exhibitors. Especially with the editor of Dive Log, Mike Scotland, Representatives from DAN world, Christmas Island diving and from Pacific Dive -Vanuatu.
5. Meeting The Human Diver, Gareth Lock and discussing safety in diving.
6. Meeting Craig Challen. Craig was one of the divers that saved the 13 schoolboys trapped in an underwater cave in Thailand.

I managed to speak with OZTek convener and owner Sue Crowe, Graig Challen and Richard Fitzpatrick and kindly asked them if they would be willing to make a presentation at one of our monthly VSAG meetings. All three kindly accepted my offer. This is definitely something to look forward to in the new year and a club meeting that should not be missed.

Overall, the show was outstanding and it was an experience that I will never forget. It felt good to be amongst a large group of people who all share the same passion, enthusiasm and love for diving. SCUBA diving technology is growing at a rapid rate and shows such as OZTek bring this technology and new innovations to our doorstep. If OZTek is coming back to Melbourne next year, make sure you don't miss it!

## NEW MEMBERS

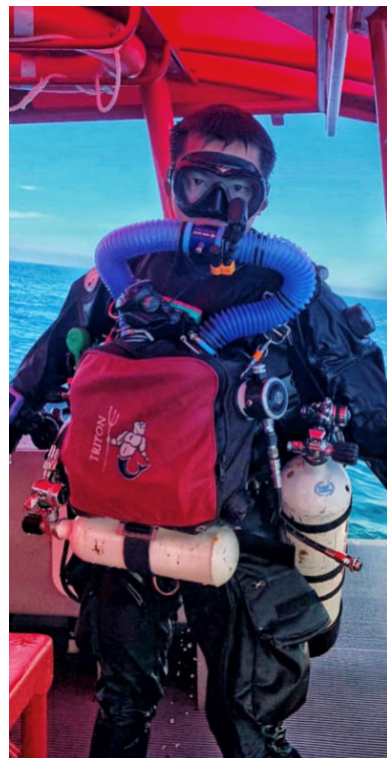
# Oskar Chen

I started diving in 2013 during a university summer break where it took me 10 days to ride a motorbike up north to Cairns from Melbourne. Since then I have been known as a boring man with no life apart from scuba diving!

After the trip to Cairns, I was excited about hunting abalones for the first three weekends. As I have no idea how to cook except instant noodles, and abalones taste like rubber unfortunately my abalone hunting didn't last long. Shortly after that I started falling in love with wreck diving and was told you have to get certified as a technical diver to do penetration dives. That's what pushed me to become a technical diving instructor and found Simple Dive, a SCUBA training school based in Melbourne.

After more than 2000 dives in Asia-Pacific, I can say I love diving around Melbourne. For me, the fascinating wall dive sites at Port Phillip Heads below 23m, wrecks in Bass Strait, fresh water dives in Mt Gambier, and the adrenaline bumping cray hunts are addictive. From time to time, I also organise dives against debris such as removal of rubbish and North Pacific Star Fish. If anyone would like to join me please let me know.

I joined VSAG last year and did a few dives with the members since then. The atmosphere is so nice where I wish I could join the weekend club dives! Feel free to send me a message if you are looking to do weekday diving guys, happy to dive any setups from single tank to mixed gases  
(oskarcsf@gmail.com or <https://www.facebook.com/oskachen>)



# Tara-Maree Lynch



My foray into diving was stumbled upon quiet by chance. Having locked eyes with a man through an aquarium at the Townsville Maritime Museum in a very Baz Luhrmann's Romeo and Juliet-esk manner, I embarked on a romantic holiday adventure that led to an unplanned trial dive on the Great Barrier Reef. I came home with some wonderful memories, a new international pen pal and a fierce determination that diving was going to become a part of my life.

I will say, getting started was anything but smooth sailing. My Open Water Course was rescheduled two times and set the tone of the luck that was to come. After a number of years with weather issues, equipment failures, operator cancellations and my darling child getting sick on dive days, I've persevered and ultimately learnt that the magic I found in diving was not just the time in the

water but the lesson of patience, flexibility and willpower that I'm not sure another sport could so eloquently teach.

As a keen appreciator of history, a traveller and self-confessed water baby, the value diving has added to my ability to connect with a destination is incalculable. The weightless tranquillity I get while floating and observing the oceans marvellous creatures is like nothing else I've come to know. How an activity can both soothe and exhilarate concurrently is truly something special.

When diving away from home and a dive operator asks where you're from and your diving experience, I feel a real sense of pride and gratitude that Port Phillip Bay and Victoria as a whole can have such challenging conditions with the response often being 'if you can dive there you can dive anywhere'. As a 7mm wetsuit wearer, who dives year-round, it always feels like such a treat when diving in tropical water or having the luxury of a being on a dive charter and being offered assistance with my gear.

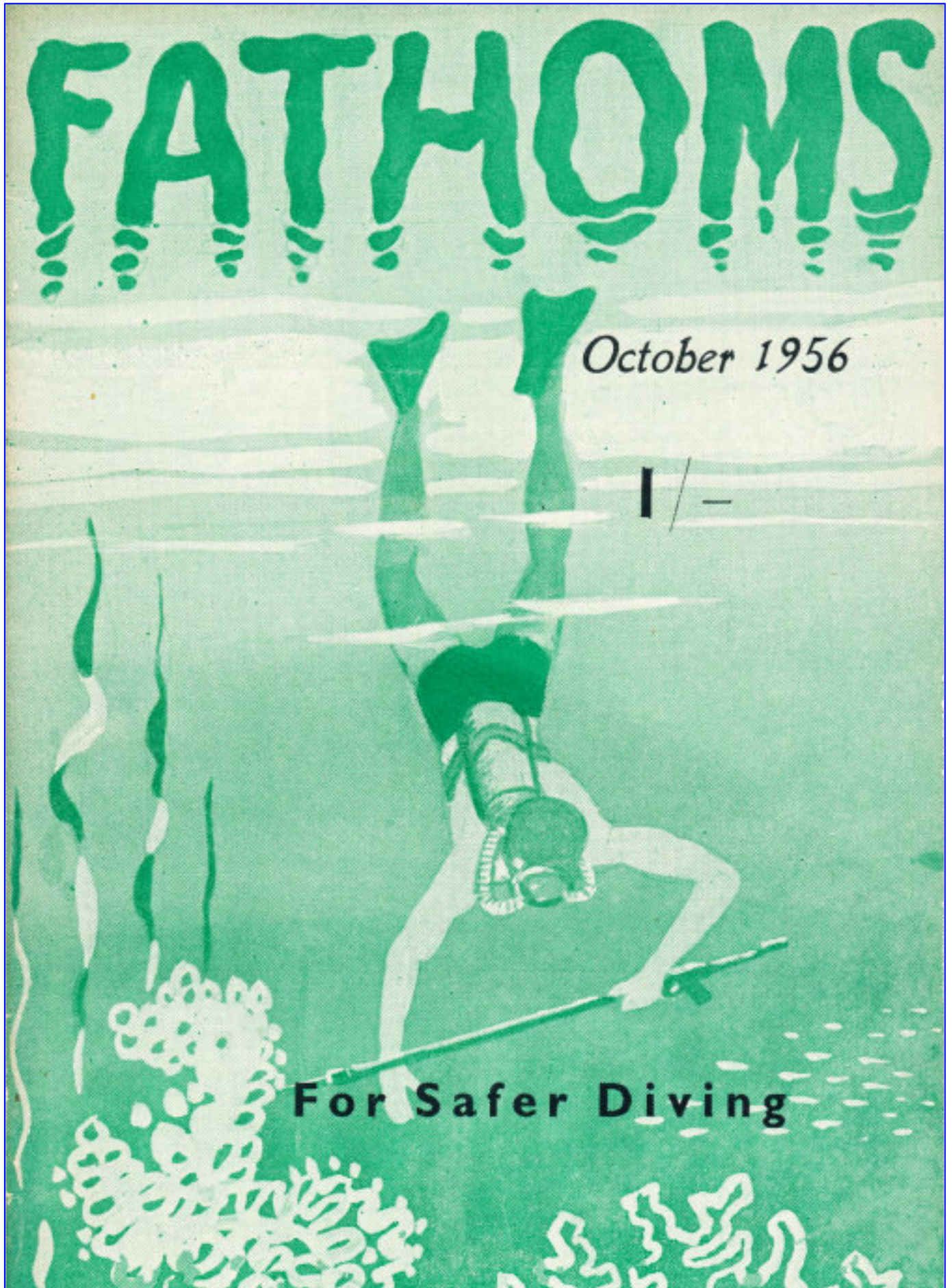
Having met a number of different VSAG members on Red Boat dives I only became aware of the club and its escapades after joining the Maritime Archaeology Association of Victoria where I (officially) met Ian. On learning about the nature of the club I was caught, hook, line and sinker, signing up the next day. I have been fortunate enough to have now been out across several dive sites that I hadn't previously dived, with club members, and just can't wait to discover more with such a wonderfully wacky and eclectic bunch.



CLUB HISTORY

# The Fathoms Journey

by Peter Matthews



The cover of the first edition of *Fathoms*



# The Fathoms Journey

by Peter Matthews

Our much-loved Fathoms magazine has had a bit of an on-again, off-again journey to get to where it is today. As a result of compiling VSAG's "Early Years" web page, we can trace its development.

The following account of the history of Fathoms is based on the publications available to the author, who was a VSAG and USFAV (Underwater Skindivers and Fishermen's Association of Victoria), member during the years in question, but there may have in fact been more publications than are available today.

VSAG's Fathoms actually started life as a retail multi-club magazine rather than an internal VSAG newsletter.

Although VSAG was formed in 1954, we have no copies of any VSAG circulars or newsletters until a 20-page magazine called Fathoms appeared in October 1956, produced by VSAG. However, it was not actually a VSAG magazine, but rather, a public magazine catering for all the scuba clubs in Victoria at that time. This may have been because the equivalent previous magazine, Snorkel, produced by USFAV seems to have stopped publication after November 1955. However, there is a bit of conjecture

continued essentially unbroken monthly through to February 1964 (almost 5 years), when it suddenly flipped in March 1964 to Fathoms, subtitled "Official Newsletter for Victorian Sub Aqua Group". It consisted of four pages via folded foolscap and with a sketch on the cover, and edited by Brian Heather. During this previous 5-year period it was roneoed on quarto or foolscap paper, varied between 1 to 4 pages in length, sometimes stapled and sometimes folded. Editors during this time were Peter Matthews as Secretary (1959-1961), Ian Beeson as Secretary (1961-1962), Les Grant as Secretary (1962-1963), John Noonan as Secretary (1963-1964), and, I believe, Brian Heather (February 1964).

Over the next two years from February 1964 until April 1966, the newsletter travelled mainly under the name of "Fathoms", subtitled variations being Newsletter, Victorian Sub-Aqua Group Newsletter, Official Newsletter of the Victorian Sub-Aqua Group, and so on. But it also sometimes travelled under the name of "VSAG Newsletter", subtitled "Fathoms"! During this period, it varied between 2-11 pages of roneoed folded foolscap with a sketch on the cover.

## VICTORIAN SUB AQUA GROUP

President and Secretary as shown in the Club's advert. on page 2.

The first outing will be held on 28th October. Members will meet at 8 a.m. at St. Kilda Station, and the venue will be decided on the day. Members without transport should be able to obtain a lift.

Second outing will be November 25th, and every three weeks after.

here because of no magazines during that time being available to the author today, but they might still turn up.

The second edition of Fathoms appeared a month later in November/December 1956, but after that, no more. The next equivalent public all-club magazine, Down Under, also by USFAV, appeared as Vol.1 No.1 in June 1959, i.e., 2-1/2 years later. We have no circulars, newsletters, or magazines from that gap period. So, at that time, Fathoms was a two-issue wonder.

Then in July 1959, the VSAG Newsletter appeared, edited by Secretary Peter Matthews. This of course was now an internal VSAG club newsletter, not really a magazine and not public. The VSAG Newsletter

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The longer length reflected that now it was more than just a newsletter but had developed into more of a magazine, with various home-grown articles of interest to members. This period also saw the introduction of the specific position of Newsletter Editor rather than leaving it to the Secretary. The editors over this period are believed to be Brian Heather, John Noonan, and Jan Watson.

From May 1966 it was titled simply "Fathoms", no longer with any sub-title. The August 1966 issue introduced a printed folded foolscap cover with a sketch of a diver by Lorraine Addison in blue monochrome, the internal pages still being roneod. This format continued for many years. Editors from May 1966 to May 1967 were John Noonan and Jan Watson, but after the May 1967 issue, Jan Watson had to retire as editor due to pressure of work,

Page Eight

"FATHOMS"



The photo above shows what can be done with homemade equipment and a reasonably good camera. Picture was taken with Plus X film using an Iloca camera. Exposure used was 1/50th at F.3.5. Day was sunny, and the water was fairly clear. Photo was taken by J. B. Swales in 15 feet of water at Refuge Cove.

## PHOTOGRAPHY

by  
"Aqua-Lens"

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causing a gap of two issues, June and July, and leaving John Noonan to continue alone as editor. However, from the November 1967 issue, Pat and Annette Reynolds joined John as editors. From November 1968 to January/February 1969 it is unclear who the editor(s) were, but in March 1969 Ron Addison took over as editor. Ron continued until September 1970 when Gordon Ryan took over. Gordon continued until at least December 1970 when the web page's records stop. Fathoms at this point was still folded foolscap with a printed monochrome cover and roneod internals.

An interesting aside, at a VSAG meeting in August 1970 was mentioned a letter we sent to "SDA" (SCUBA Divers Association?) about their plan to introduce a newsletter called "Fathom". And in a history of Australian skindiving magazines is the following entry:

"In December of 1970 "Fathom" magazine appeared in newsagent's stands. Produced by Gareth Powell with John Harding as editor and Roy Bisson in charge of design, Fathom set new standards in production and design and continued for 10 issues until early 1973." This appeared in:

<https://usfa.org.au/a-brief-look-at-australian-skin-and-scuba-diving-periodicals/>

We really owe a great debt of gratitude to Fathoms, and its predecessor publications, and its many editors over the years, who faithfully recorded all of VSAG's activities and plans, and which has allowed the author to compile the web page with such a detailed catalogue of VSAG's activities, not to mention other diving-related history recorded during those early years of 1954-1970.

## DON'T READ THIS !

Am I kidding—if some of you guys don't write a few articles you will be looking at blank pages in the next issue.

And if some of our potential advertisers don't advertise, you are going to miss out on a lot of sales.

All jokes aside, if you are able to write an article, able to sketch, or if you wish to advertise in this magazine, then I want to hear from you.

Address correspondence to—

The Editor,  
"Fathoms,"  
438 High Street, Prahran — LA 5335



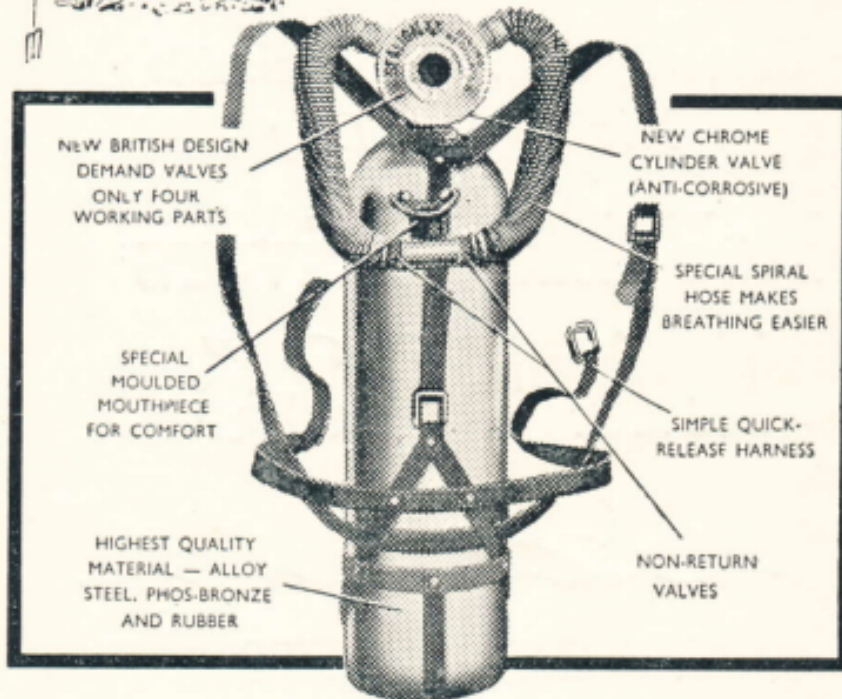
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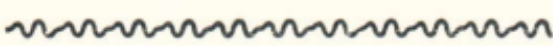
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"FATHOMS"

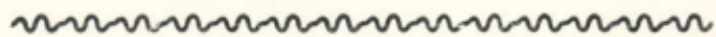
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# No Doubt

by Gareth Lock - Human Divers



The following is an edited account from a confidential submission. This narrative highlights the power of doubt and what happens when there isn't strong psychological safety and trust within the team. It is often said that anyone can thumb a dive at any time for any reason. However, in reality, this isn't necessarily the case. There are often social pressures that prevent us. Fortunately, the instructor spotted that there was an issue and took control and rearranged the team.

We were diving as a three-person team in a cave in Mexico and I was at the back on the way in (Diver 3), in front of me was the instructor (Diver 2) and upfront was the other diver (Diver 1). We started on our stage cylinders and dropped them along the way and swam on using our "back gas". As we approached the third and final Tee, I knew I was getting close to turn pressure.

When we arrived at the final Tee, we all made a pressure check and I had around 15 bar remaining this would give me around 20 minutes to look around. As I glanced at my teammates, I was sure I saw the SPG of the lead diver (Diver 1) and I thought they were at their turn pressure but had signaled a higher pressure. This was the start of the problem.

I had not reached my turn pressure, and neither had Diver 2 - so I reasoned we had enough gas in the team for the 20 minutes. I kept this thought to myself.

As it turned out, Diver 1 signaled to turn the dive at about 10 minutes past the Tee and so we did not use as much gas over the turn pressure of Diver 1. This seemed "good". Now that we had turned the dive, this meant that I would now be leading on the way out as we maintain the same physical arrangement in the team. We had something like 90 minutes ahead of us to get out.

On this swim, I had time on my hands and started to think more about the issue of my teammate going past their turn pressure. I realised that actually they had done something quite selfish and put the whole team in danger as we now collectively had less gas between us. My thoughts snowballed from there when I realised that there was less gas "for me" and if I had a problem, it was a long way to go.

I had some horrible thoughts and even imagined what my girlfriend and mother would be discussing at my funeral. I had genuine fear at this moment. I was aware that my breathing rate was increasing and my mind was simply not on the job of navigating home. I knew I should stop to collect myself and so I signaled the team

to stop. This was the first active signal of a problem I had given, perhaps 30 minutes after I first saw a problem.

My team were great, and they simply waited for me to give the signal to go. I did not appreciate at the time that they had already seen my passive behavior as signs of a problem and so they were not adding any pressure in any way.

My breathing had calmed, but not fully and so I thought I should wait for longer. I then realised that I could not wait forever and was probably not going to ever get to my normal breathing level or level of calmness. I would have to “suck it up” and get on with it. I gave the signal to go and we got going.

It can be easy to spot a diver’s state of mind if you know what to look for. I was checking my SPGs far more often than normal, became more fixated on the line and stopped using my lights to look around. My body was simply not as relaxed.

Unfortunately, my mind kept on spiraling, and I felt myself losing it again. I gave another signal to stop. At this time, Diver 2, the instructor took direct action. Essentially, they made sure I was aware of all my gas and theirs. Then the team order was switched so I was in the middle. This is the standard order for a three-person team where the “problem” diver is surrounded by other divers to best look after them.

Watching someone else in the lead position took away some of the anxiety and gave me a different focus and also put more light in front of me. Things were getting better now, but I was still conscious I was breathing more than usual and was making mental calculations about my gas reserves – which were “enough”, but the maths was rather a cold comfort.

We reached our stage cylinders, and I knew we had about 30 minutes to go. Things were getting better.

I was so happy to see the light from the cavern zone and it was not until I was back in the car driving away that I really could say I felt normal. Rather interesting was that I exited the water with my planned pressure and had not in fact been breathing as much as I thought, but my perception of it was clearly a long way off.

We did not speak about the dive there and then, and for me that was right. I was simply not in the right state of mind to talk properly about it or to learn anything from it. I did of course feel rather low and somewhat of a failure for letting myself get into that state and impact on the exit. My teammates knew this and didn’t bring it up.

We spoke the next day and I think it is quite true that you often learn the most from the dives that did not go well.

## Lessons Learned

What I like most about this incident is how many separate things I learned from the single, simple mistake I made.

You could say that the whole thing was down to lack of experience, but it is the way in which experience affected different levels of my thinking and actions that interests me.

### 1. How easy would it have been to just ask Diver 1 what their gas pressure was if I was not sure?

I can’t be sure of what I saw and simply carried on with an assumption I had not verified. I did not ask because I didn’t want to make a fuss or come across as aggressive and someone not trusting their teammates.

If there is a question, you can bet that now I will stop and try to answer it. A problem is “real” even if it is a perceived problem. Anything that affects performance or ability is a problem!

### 2. Why did I carry on if I thought my teammate was at their turn pressure?

I had a false sense of security based on my confidence in my other teammate who “would not let anything bad happen” as they had more experience – I did not take enough responsibility.

I also selfishly thought that I was OK for gas and was not thinking as part of a team.

### 3. Why did I not say anything sooner?

I tried to keep the problem to myself. I did not want to appear weak or afraid. I thought it was my problem that I was getting so wound up and that I had to solve it.

I realised that actually, I had put the team in danger by not saying anything. What if they needed me and I was too distracted to help? I had done something “as bad” or worse by keeping the problem to myself.

Keeping quiet is not helpful to anyone and you can bet that I will speak up no matter the company I am in if I am not sure about something. Worrying about how I might be seen means this is not the team for me. The team will benefit from the avoidance of doubt. I actively want to be questioned by divers. If I can’t justify why I am doing something, then how I can expect them to do the same?

We have limited abilities in the water to solve problems, so we should embrace the idea of turning around and going home. This simply is not our day.

This can be summed up with a quote from Sam in the movie Ronin.

***“Whenever there is any doubt, there is no doubt.”***

*The Human Diver was created by experienced diver Gareth Lock who has committed his life to diving, diver training and the training of high-performance teams after his 25 year career in the Royal Air Force.*

<https://www.thehumandiver.com/>



## EQUIPMENT

# Equipment Specialist Day

by Alistair King

Recently Brian Heatherich organised two Equipment Specialist days. The venue was the Coast Guard building on the St Kilda marina. I attended the 20th August session along with Brian and six other keen VSAGers.

The purpose of the day was to look at how dive equipment works, how to maintain it and what repairs are involved.



The course was run by equipment guru Jim Dyer who has a truly encyclopaedic knowledge of diving and diving equipment, gained from huge experience as a technician and from countless dives. Jim has also worked for several dive equipment companies over a long career. This did not however constrain his down-to-earth and direct commentary, particularly in relation to the meaningless marketing spin that manufacturers often use to sell products.

Jim worked through all items of kit systematically, covering masks, snorkels, fins, regulators, tanks, gauges, seals, BCDs, computers, wet and dry suits, knives and torches.

Coming to SCUBA after many years' away from a misspent spearfishing youth, I found his comments on the evolution of even simple items like fins fascinating, and a strong incentive to give my current gear more critical appraisal.

I did struggle to keep up when we got to the topic of regulators, which are more complex and varied more in design than I'd imagined.

This was a non-certificate course and Jim stressed that it did not provide the level of knowledge and skill needed to undertake repairs to critical equipment such as regulators. He did however underline the importance of cleaning and maintenance, and illustrated some of his comments with photos of gear that had been neglected by its owners, some of which could only be described as disgusting, and in some cases, life-threatening!

It's not possible to cover even a fraction of what was covered here but to give you a taste, it included topics like:

- Why mask straps moved from the frame to the skirt
- Why you should use a snorkel and how to keep it free from cockroaches
- How blade, articulated and split fins compare
- What a technician can learn about a tank's condition from the colour of the first stage filter
- The different types of second stage and their characteristics
- What to do if you get a massive free flow underwater
- How to lubricate O-rings
- How to store your tanks and why to never let them empty completely
- The three types of BCD and their respective characteristics
- How to safely test if your camera, torch seals are working

And the age-old question - how to pee in a dry suit!

The session was very interactive, with many questions and anecdotes from attendees, not to mention several humorous asides (Not surprising when dry suit issues like the one above are discussed).

The catering was great (if, like me you love pizza) and the venue was comfortable and suitably maritime, albeit its view over a grey, windswept bay was not the best enticement to get in the water anytime soon!

It was a very interesting day and, as a relative newbie, wonderful meeting and getting to know some more club members. Special thanks must go to Jim for sharing his immense knowledge and to Brian's great organising which ensured the day's smooth running.



# XMAS BBQ

by Peter Walters



The XMAS BBQ was a great event for the club to finish up the year socially. It was a little ironic that, what seemed the best (possibly one of the only) diving days of the summer so far was instead filled with drinking and eating. But with around 50 attending, including life-members and potential new members it was a very successful day.

A big thanks to John Lawler for organising the venue. The Beaumaris Motor Yacht Squadron is a wonderful setting for a diving club event and VSAG would sincerely like to thank them for their generosity in allowing us to use their venue.

Also, thanks to Matthijs and Angus for organising the day. The 3 types of marinated meat were a highlight and the selection of salads and desserts complemented this well. Thanks to Matthijs for organising the meat and to all who provided the latter. There was a team of three, who cooked the meats to perfection - thanks to Michelle, Arthur and Matthijs.

Finally, thanks to the committee members for helping with the set up, serving and cleaning up after.

Arthur, Ian and John brought together the club competitions which resulted in the following winners.

**The Literary award** – this year we had equal first winners:

Carol Campisano - for her article 'My favourite dive site- Exmouth W.A'.

Peter Mosse - for his article 'Diving the Prom - EPIRB encounter'.

**The Fathoms award** – Peter Matthews for his outstanding work in collating and cataloging Fathoms Magazines from the periods September 1954 to December 1970. He has created a VSAG early history page.

**Club Member of the Year** – Ian Scholey

**Club Member of the Year runner up** – Peter Beaumont

**Photo of the Year** – Matthijs Smith





# XMAS BBQ





## EQUIPMENT

# If You Suspect Something Is Wrong....

by Peter Mosse

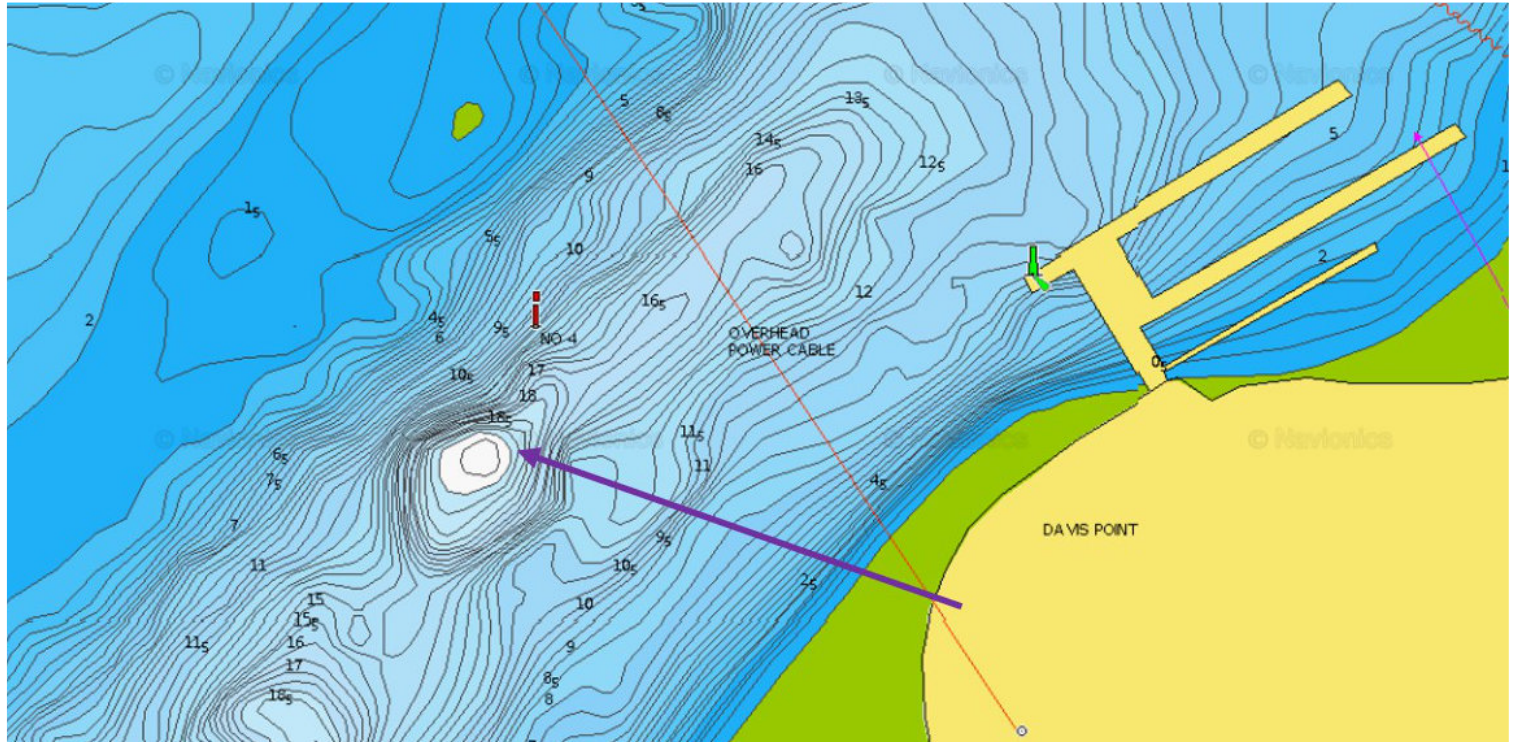


Figure 1. The San Remo channel and the approximate dive route taken on this dive.

If you suspect something is wrong with an item of your diving equipment, it probably is! Repair, service or replace it without delay. The following account of a recent dive illustrates what can go wrong, and it could have been a whole lot worse.

I regularly dive the San Remo sponge gardens and channel. It is a challenging dive site. The tidal currents flow aggressively through the area and there is only a very short window of opportunity.

- The first challenge is to judge when to enter the water. The tide tables are at best indicative with slack water being anything from 40 minutes early to 35 minutes late. You need to watch the water and look for boils and also flow past the jetty pylons. If a north wind is blowing, it is very difficult and even with a south wind the surface can be disturbed.
- The second challenge is to know where you are going. The channel is several hundred meters off shore, so compass use is essential (Figure 1). You need to be competent with the use of a compass and must trust it. Boat traffic overhead can be quite heavy, and obviously in summer there are many more boats, tourist boats and jet skis, so coming up is not really an option.

I have successfully dived it many times. But this last dive broke all the rules!

I use two small wrist compasses (Figure 2). I like to be able to verify using the two instruments where I need to head. I don't need a large compass because I only need compass point accuracy and not degree accuracy.



Figure 2. The two compasses I use.





Figure 3. Photograph showing the bubble in the compass (arrow).

Bubbles had appeared in both compasses over the years. One more so than the other (Figure 3).

Over the last few dives, I felt the bubbles were starting to interfere with the turning of the compass disc. I had to twist my wrist or shake it a bit. I knew something was wrong. I had actually started the process of purchasing new compasses but for some reason did not complete it. I think I balked at the postage cost and decided I would try to pick them up in person from the shop.

Consequently, I found myself diving with the same two compasses. I tried to dive on the Saturday but missed the tide. It was way early. So, I came back the next day. The tide was also very early but I did manage to enter pretty much on slack tide. When the tide started to turn, as judged by the change in direction of floating weed, I headed back. But at that stage the compasses just wouldn't function reliably and I really did not have much time to "muck around". I tried to maintain an easterly bearing but the current and topography seemed way wrong. I didn't want to, but felt I had no alternative but to surface. Listening very carefully for boat traffic, I surfaced and had a quick look and took a quick bearing and headed back down. For some reason I still could not get a reliable bearing. I had swum some distance which turned out to be the right direction but I still couldn't get a reliable bearing and the current seemed to be in the wrong direction. I had to surface again. Not good and quite risky. Slow ascent. Pause near the surface to look and listen and then up.

I found I was 100 or more metres from the shore with the tide heading out to Bass Strait. There was nothing for it but to fin strongly and watch for boats. I angled across the current and could see I was making headway but I wasn't sure I would make the sand spit before the tide carried me past it. Luckily, I did. The swim was hard and reinforces why it is necessary when diving to maintain a good level of fitness. You never know when you might need that cardio pulmonary reserve.

I do have to admit to some pretty poor single-minded thinking. While I was completing this surface swim, I failed to inflate my SMB. It just did not cross my mind.

It's a challenging dive. It's a great dive. The sessile invertebrate life is spectacular (Figures 4 and 5).

But to do it, both you and your equipment need to be in top notch condition.

**Remember if you suspect something is wrong with a piece of critical diving equipment, do not use it. Fix or replace it.**

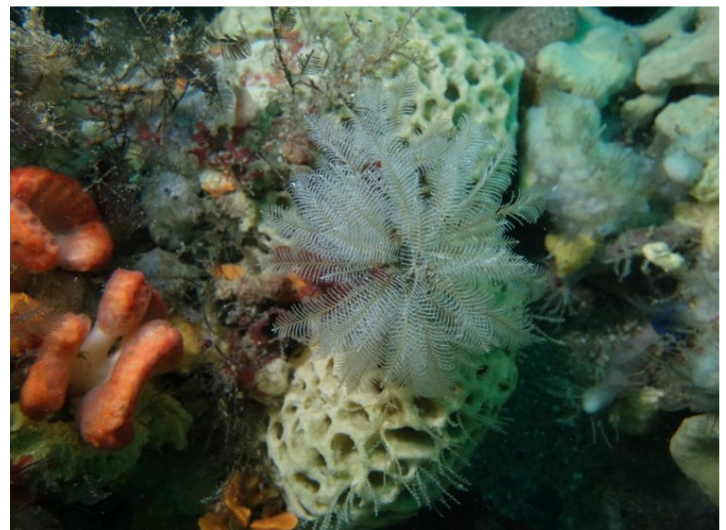


Figure 4. A delicate white hydroid.

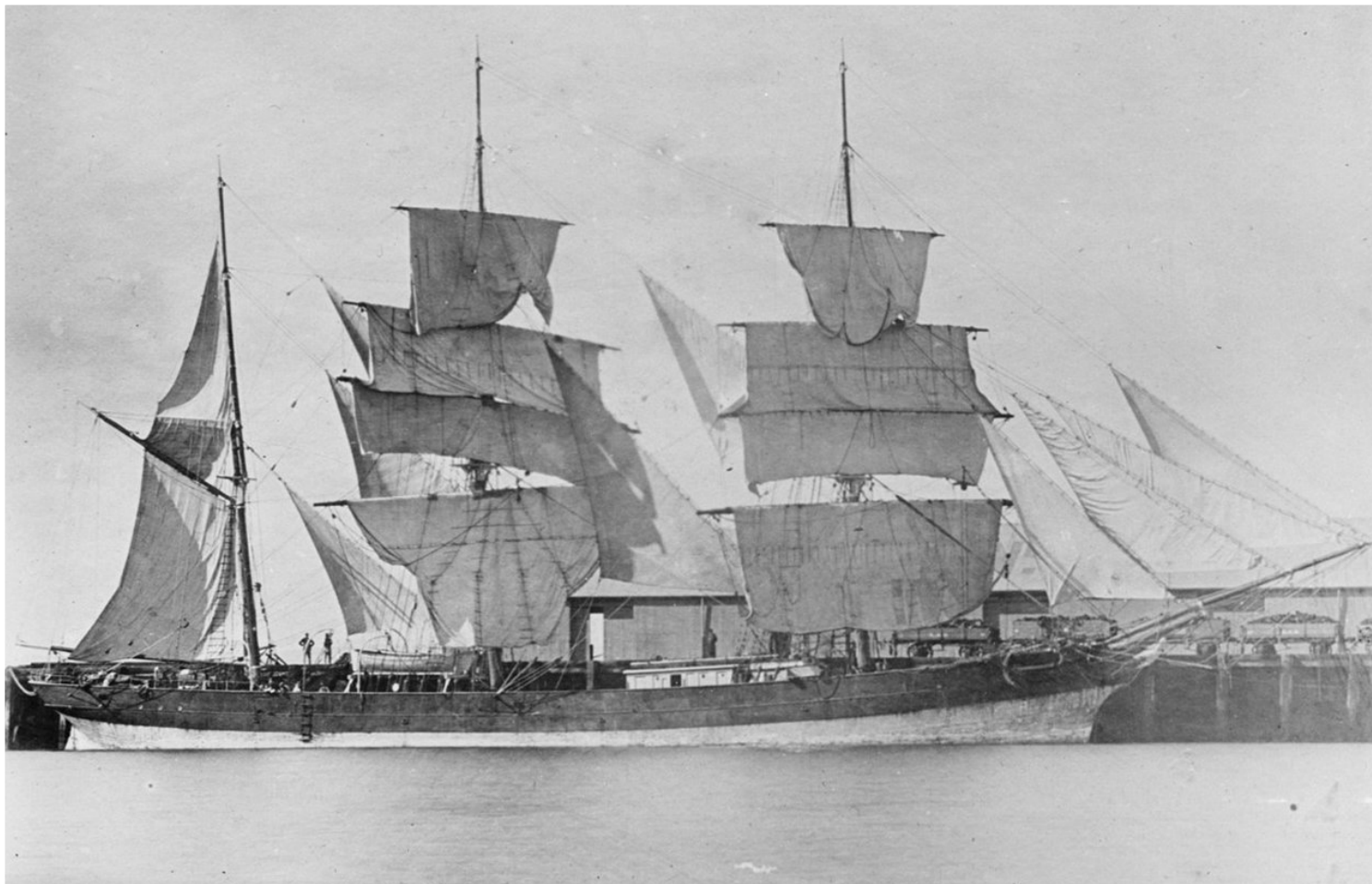


Figure 5. A compound ascidian and two small anemones.

## DIVE REPORT

# The Casablanca

by Ian Scholey



In late July 2022, after nearly 18 months in the making, Chris Porter and I finally completed our Normoxic Trimix course with a dive on the wreck of the Casablanca.

To be honest it's not a wreck I had heard much about and a google search failed to turn up the usual pictures and video from other people's dives.

The Casablanca was a three masted iron barque and was in my view a very smart looking ship.

She was built by T.Royden & Sons in Liverpool, UK in 1868. The overall length of the iron vessel was approximately 52.5m, beam 8.5m and draught 5.3m with a displacement weight of 545 Tonne. The ship had a long and interesting career spanning a period of more than 80 years. Initially owned by British owners, she made her way to southern waters when purchased by W.H.Heayes of Auckland. She then made regular trans-Tasman voyages carrying timber to various Australian ports and returning to NZ with coal from NSW.

In May 1912 it was again purchased, this time by the Melbourne Steamship company and was converted for use as a coal hulk. After several years of solid service, she was berthed at Reid Street pier at

Williamstown in May 1935 when a strong northerly wind developed. The wind caused the ship to roll severely and bump against the pier. Plates were torn loose below the waterline, and she began to sink. The pumps were quickly started but she continued to fill with water. To save her she was towed by the tug Tooronga into shallow water near the Ann Street pier and beached.

She did re-enter service after repairs and was utilised until a decision to decommission her was made in September 1948. At this time, she was stripped of anything useful with her bell being gifted to Scotch College for use on their football ground.

On 16 February 1950 she was taken in tow by the Tooronga once again. This time she was taken to area 3 of the Ships Graveyard and scuttled. The first charge consisted of ten pounds of gelignite ignited at 5.03 PM was quickly followed by a second charge of five pounds one minute later. The ship started to sink at the stern. She finally disappeared beneath the waves at 5.14 PM.

Loaded up with twin 12L cylinders containing Trimix and two stages bottles containing our two decompression gases we descended onto the wreck which now sits in 57m of water. With rain on the surface, it was quite dark as we descended but our



torches easily cut through the darkness, and we were lucky enough to have visibility of about 15m.

The clipper shaped bow points directly back to the surface, it forms an A shape on the sandy seafloor, and this is where we started our dive. As we swam the length of the ship all three masts were clearly identifiable suggesting the wreck was scuttled with them intact. The forward mast is lying at 45-degree angle out from the starboard bow. The centre mast is lying 90 degrees to the length of the hull, also towards the starboard bow, a crow's nest is visible 3/4 way up the centre mast. The stern mast is approximately 45 degrees to the hull, pointing also towards the starboard side of the vessel. The port side hull has collapsed inwards, the starboard side has disappeared mostly into the sand, only the original ribs of her are protruding. The masts really are an impressive size

and give an impression of how big the ship was. The highlight of the dive for me was at the stern. Here she has a distinctive sailing ship wheel which is still fully intact and is now covered in pink anemone and other growth. It would make for a spectacular photograph. Unfortunately, I had left my camera at home as I wanted to focus on the dive as it was a course dive. Other highlights included the deck winches and an impressive amount of fish life.

Our 19 minutes of bottom time were quickly up, and we began our 41-minute ascent. Our objective for the dive was to perfect our ascent in our team of four divers. It is quite a challenge to keep arm's length from another three divers while controlling your ascent and completing gas switches etc. but things went very well, and we were happy with the dive. It is a wreck I will be trying to get back to at some stage soon.



# Magnificent Melibe

by Peter Mosse

In early July 2022, Ian Scholey hosted me for my first dive at Blairgowrie. It's hard to believe I haven't dived it after all these years of diving but at the time I was diving "Up the Bay", Blairgowrie Marina didn't exist. Portsea Pier was the go to destination for Dive School checkouts, or a jetty dive.

With the deepening of the channel in the Port Phillip Bay Heads and resultant heavy swell eroding the Portsea front beaches and making diving at the pier very difficult, divers migrated away from Portsea and Blairgowrie became a popular spot.

Under Ian's confident guidance and seemingly magnifying glass eyes, I was treated to a rare opportunity to see much of the micro life the site is famous for.

Early in the dive, Ian excitedly pointed out a single *Melibe* sp. He almost went straight to it! This species is a prized photographic target for Nudibranch fans. It is often quoted as being rare, but the limited sightings are more due to its excellent camouflage than actual rarity. Over coffee he said he had seen it in roughly the same location at the same time last year. If left undisturbed he has observed the animal staying in the same location for several weeks at a time.

We stopped for some time to photograph this amazing animal (Figures 1 and 2).

It is instructive to pause and just wonder at the evolutionary process that resulted in such an animal that strongly mimics a brown alga and at the same time developing a massive cowl at the anterior end. To feed, the animal starts with their cowl nearly parallel to their substratum. As they move their body forward, they bring their hood down until it contacts the substratum. Water is pushed from the hood once contact has been made with the substratum, and prey is forced towards the mouth.



*Figure 1. Head on view of Melibe sp. showing the fully extended cowl and rhinophores (Photo Ian Scholey).*



*Figure 2. Side view of Melibe sp. showing the algal frond like appearance of the body appendages (Photo Peter Mosse).*

Many of the other nudibranchs Ian showed me were very small. I found myself taking photos of what I was shown hoping I would be able to see something in the photo. I did, but most were very out of focus and indeed very small. Too small for my aging eyes to see whilst diving!

Thanks for the great dive Ian, and thanks for the loan of the heated undervest. I lasted 90 minutes in my wetsuit in 11-12°C water, but Ian lasted his usual 2.5-to-3-hour dive. But at least now I know part of his secret. He uses a heated undervest also! They certainly make a difference.



# QLD/NSW Road Trip

## – April 2022

Article and images by *Andrew Mckernan and Brian Heatherich*

*Underwater scenes from the Tobruk*

Towards the end of 2021, Ian Scholey put out a request for anyone interested in a diving road trip leaving Brisbane and travelling around Southern Queensland and Batemans Bay for April 2022. Those who ended up responding and joining Ian on the trip were Andrew Mckernan, Mick Kakafikas and Brian Heatherich. The trip began with some trepidation as we flew in over flooded towns and silt-laden estuaries spewing mud into the ocean. It was a heart-wrenching scene. We rented a mini-van and drove from Brisbane Airport up to Hervey Bay.

### Day 2-3: Ex-HMAS Tobruk

Our first day of diving was on the HMAS Tobruk. This is a very recent addition to Australian wreck diving options. Scuttled in 2018 and opened to diving in 2019, most of the paintwork is still visible. The top

surface of the ship is kept particularly well buffed and polished by the numerous green turtles lazing on the smooth surface.

The scuttling process didn't go to plan and the wreck ended up laying on her side. This was found to actually add a bit of interest to the dive as divers now swim through stairwells and elevator shafts going sideways instead of vertically. With good visibility we could appreciate the massive size of this ship. The wheelhouse is quite spacious and easily accessed. We managed many other swim through trips over the course of our four dives.

At the close of the first day we were distraught with first world problems. Andrew lost his Go-Pro as we surfaced and Ian Scholey realised he had left his wide angle lens at home!



*NSW and Queensland in flood as we arrived.*



*Heading out to the dive site.*



An urgent drive through all the thrift shops and cash converters in Hervey Bay delivered an interim solution for Ian. He found a partly compatible lens but it had some reflection issues when fitted in his housing. After a lot of huffing, puffing and sharing half a dozen James Squire beers, the juices of inspiration started to flow. The beer carton was hastily sacrificed for the greater cause of macro-photography.

On day two of diving the Tobruk, we did a reconnaissance search for Andrew's Go-Pro. Full credit to eagle-eyed Ian who virtually dropped on top of the camera!

After the dive we travelled down to Rainbow Beach for our next days diving

#### **Day 4-5 (4-5th): Rainbow Beach: Wolf Rock**

Female grey nurse sharks stop off at Wolf Rock during their gestation, while the males keep travelling further south between seasons. The pregnant females make for an interesting dive. They drift past you in a state of sleepiness with their bellies wriggling away with the young doing their shark training exercise. We had two days diving with grey nurse sharks and manta rays. There were plenty of moray eels peering out of their hidey holes as well as Wobbegong sharks resting between the rocky caverns.

The Wolf Rock Dive Centre operates out of Rainbow Beach with a fairly small boat.

It can become a bit crowded when dive teams are swapping over and at times



*Underwater scene from the Tobruk*



*Ian Scholey does a complete MacGyver on his camera housing with a beer carton!*



some people are requested to go to the front of the boat while other divers kit-up. The crew were very friendly and helpful.

Visibility was limited at Wolf Rock as they were affected by the recent flood waters. The limited visibility added to the mystique of the experience as the giant mantas and sharks loomed overhead in the gloomy waters. Some footage of the dive is in this link: <https://youtu.be/GH6AQqRBFwM>.

### Day 6 (6th April) Mooloolaba – Ex-HMAS Brisbane

Sunreef dive boats in Mooloolaba can be summed up in one expletive: Wow! This is day trip luxury.



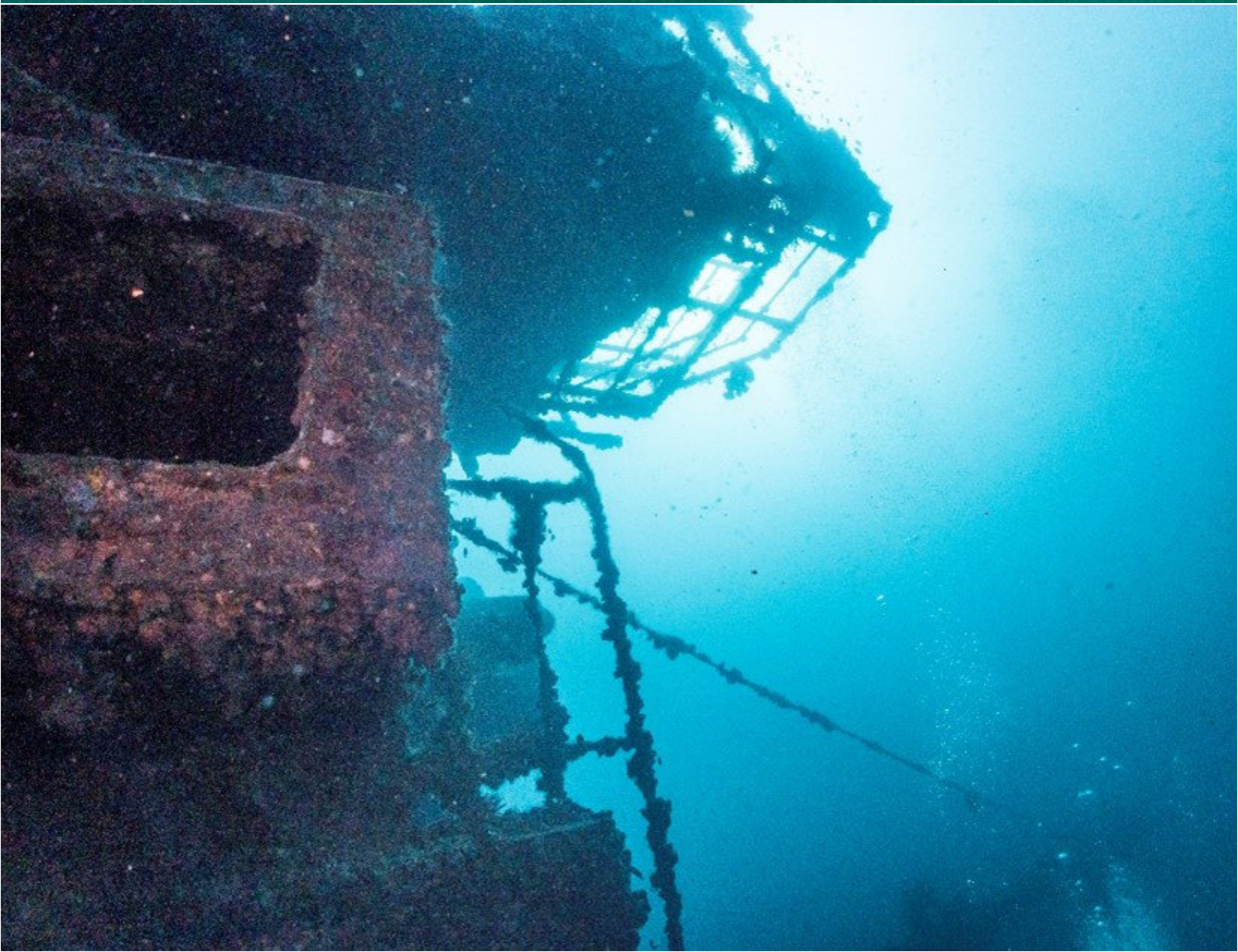
*Surface time at Wolf Rock between dives.*



*Underwater scene from the Tobruk*



*Underwater scenes from the Tobruk*







*Mick testing the seating on the dive boat.*

Their seats are better than aircraft comfort but without the cattle-class cramped leg-space.

The Brisbane is similar in size to the Tobruk, but the dive feels quite different. The incredible visibility gave a sense of awe to the size of this wreck. The radio tower is at a convenient 6m for a safety stop while you gaze along the full length of the vessel. We explored what felt like the entire ship over the course of four dives. Fish life on the Brisbane is incredible. You can watch a 2 minute video of the dive on this link: <https://youtu.be/9KAT-WxXvgU>

After the morning dive we headed straight to Julien Rocks to try and miss a forecast swell associated with a low pressure system that was predicted over the next few days.

#### **Day 7-8 (7th -8th) April: Byron Bay: Julien Rocks**

Unfortunately, the extreme silt levels in the area dampened our diving experience at Julien Rocks.

We did manage a dive to check it out, but misplaced one of our divers who was lost in a blown out cloud. It was so thick that his lights could not penetrate the thick brown cloud or find his way out. He rejoined the team at the surface and needed to cut the dive short.

While we were down one count on the number of divers present, we did manage a brief glimpse of a leopard shark. But with our enthusiasm waning we decided to skip the option of a follow up dive due to the conditions.

The poor diving conditions at Byron Bay and not being able to go for a second dive did drive Ian to finish off Mick's special Japanese whiskey, which we all assisted in. We also enjoyed a great Japanese dinner while staying at Byron Bay and discussing missed diving opportunities.

#### **Day 8-10 (8-10th April) Mooloolaba- Sunshine Coast**

After dropping Andrew off at the airport in Byron Bay we headed backup to Mooloolaba with the hope of being able to dive. We were told that diving would probably be off the following day and later this was confirmed, so we settled into our digs and after getting our dive gear out to dry we spent the afternoon exploring some of the finer aspects of Mooloolaba.

The following day, as diving was off due to the conditions, the three of us took the car into the hinterlands of the Sunshine coast. Although wet for most of the day, we did enjoy the drive and getting out when the weather allowed. We particularly enjoyed the bakery at Mapleton with their pies, pasties and especially their custard tarts. Mick thought they were the best tarts ever!



*Underwater scene from the Tobruk*



*Underwater scenes from the Tobruk*



The following day, diving the ex-HMAS Brisbane was still off due to weather conditions, so Ian and Brian decided to go nudibranch hunting at the mouth of the Mooloolabah River. Ian had been told that the mouth of the river hosted a numerous nudi's and we were keen to find some of them.

After picking up a tank each, Ian and Brian headed down to the mouth of the river to check out the nudi action. Unfortunately, the river mouth was still being affected from the inland floods and the resulting visibility was around 1/2 metre. Brian returned to shore after a fruitless search of about 40 minutes and Ian returned after 2 hours with a smile on his face and with a finally tally of nudies found being zero. You can't fault him for effort at least.

The upshot from the day was that we did find another superb Japanese restaurant and again had an enjoyable dinner.

We were told that diving would again be on for our last day of diving and we looked forward to another chance of diving the Brisbane. Although the swell

was still up, we were got ready quickly and were the first group in and down to the wreck surface.

Unfortunately, the conditions and swell were still pretty bad when we arrived on the deck with visibility amount a metre. After a brief meeting on deck while being swept back and forwards, we called the dive. We made our way back to the surface passing the other groups making made their way down with a look of wonderment in their faces on why we were heading back up the line so soon. It was not long before they rejoined us on the boat for the same reason and we headed back into shore with lots of time on our hands.

Other than the weather conditions limiting some of the diving, it was a great opportunity to dive some different sites and get to know some of the other members of the club a lot more. Everyone got along with each other surprisingly well and the benefit of diving with four was that we were always had a dive party that dived at a similar level and style and was always guaranteed a dive if the conditions were right (or not in some cases).



*We also found some special tricks to clean out Andrew's Regs when we picked them up on his behalf as he had left them on our previous trip a few days prior.*



*Ian returning from his Nudi dive.*



# PHOTO COMPETITION

## *Winner*

June - 2022



Frank Kleintz - Banded Coral Shrimp - Padangbai, Bali



# PHOTO COMPETITION

## *Runners up*

June - 2022



*Frank Kleintz - Rhinopias - Padang Bai, Bali*



*Bobbi O'Riley - Cuttlefish Aggregation - Whyalla (Stony Point), SA.*



# PHOTO COMPETITION

## *Winner*

July - 2022



*David Reinhard - Anemone fish - Philippines*



# PHOTO COMPETITION

## *Runners up*

July - 2022



*David Reinhard - Anemones - Philippines*



*Peter Mosse - Octopus - Blairgowrie*



# PHOTO COMPETITION

## *Winner*

September - 2022



*Marc Alexander - Baby Seahorse - Blairgowrie*



# PHOTO COMPETITION

## *Runners up*

September - 2022



*Enoch Ko - Weedy Seadragon Against the Current - Portsea Pier*



*Marc Alexander - Port Jackson Shark - Blairgowrie*



# PHOTO COMPETITION

## *Winner*

October - 2022



*David Flew - Joseph's technicolour fish - Philippines*



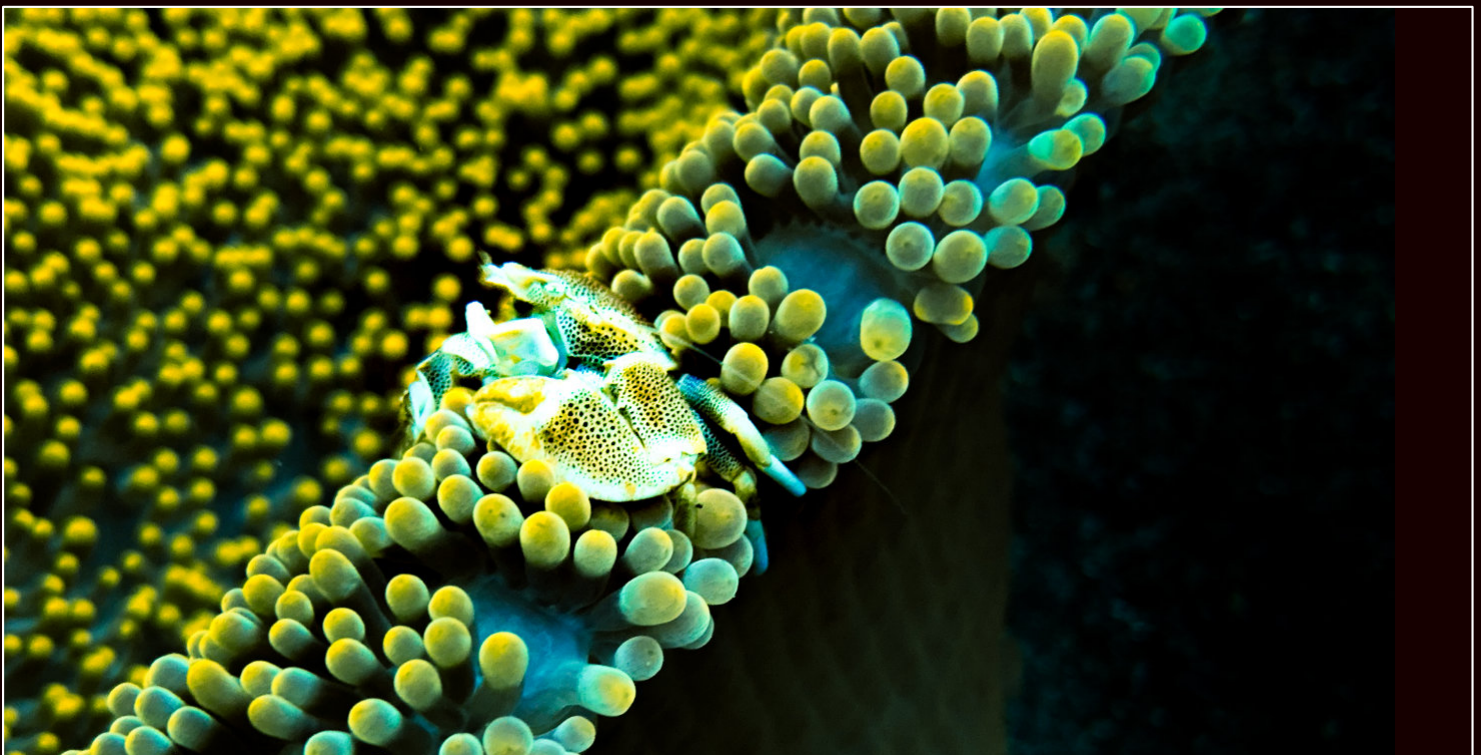
# PHOTO COMPETITION

## *Runners up*

October - 2022



*Marc Alexander - Dirty Dancing - Blairgowrie*



*Elliott English - Porcelain Crab - Philippines*





# 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 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> 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](mailto: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 2022-2023

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