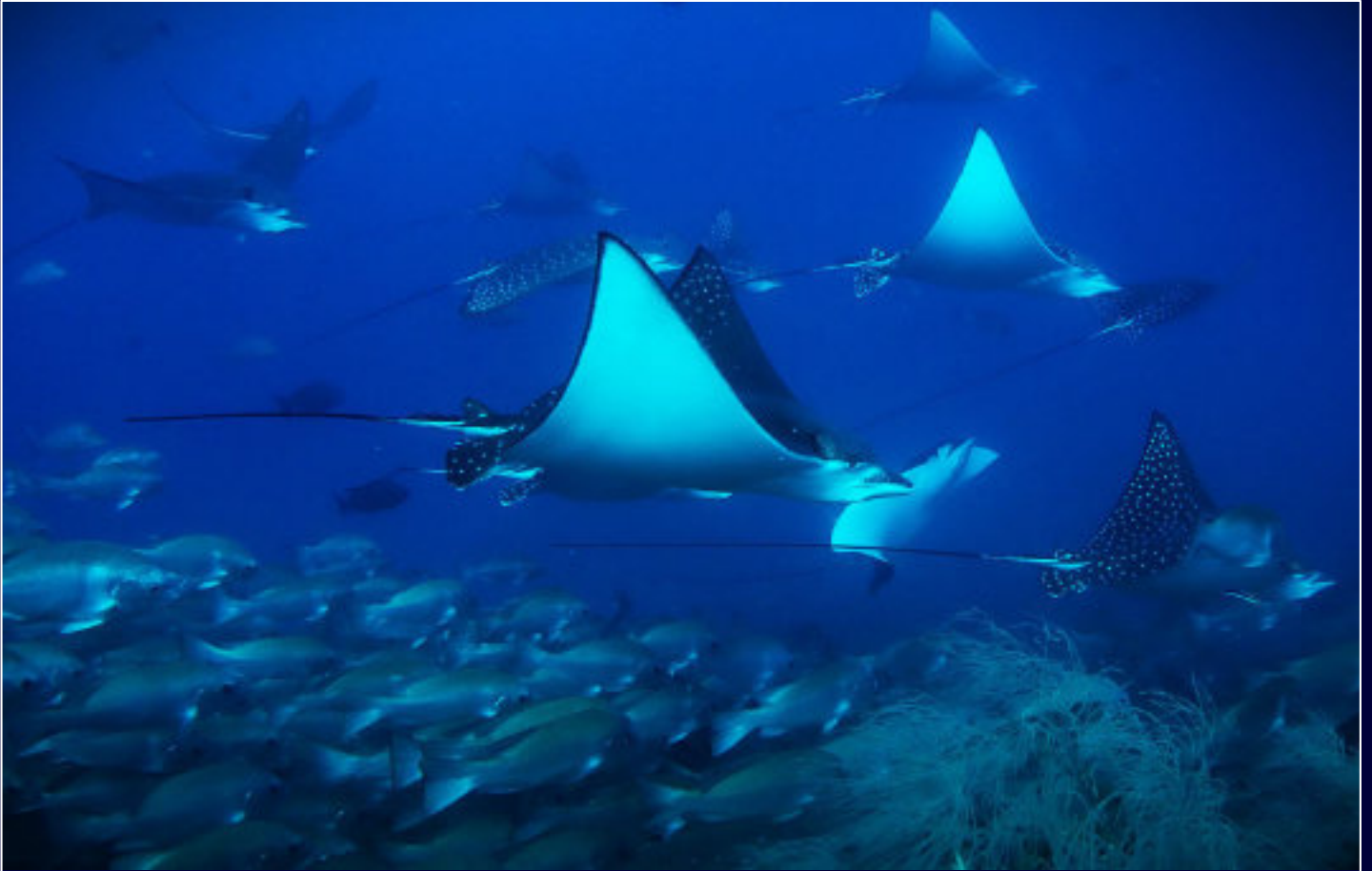


Fathoms

Official Magazine of the Victorian Sub-Aqua Group (est. 1954) SUMMER 2024-25



2024 Photo competition winner - Peter Mosse - Flight of the eagles - Yongala

The Hurricane Wreck

Diving Rye Jetty

Dive retrospectives

Alor Island, Indonesia

Being an Independent Diver

VSAG Photo competition winners



Contents

	Page
Return to the Hurricane	1
Diving Rye Jetty	3
Dive retrospectives: to-do or not-to-do	4
Alor Island, Indonesia	5
Being an Independent Diver	11
Photo Competitions	12
Club Equipment	17
Emergency Contact Information	18
VSAG Committee & Club Roles	19



VICTORIAN WRECKS

Return to the Hurricane

by *Des Williams*

I could not resist writing a small report about my recent return to diving with VSAG, as diving with this amazing club has always been my happy place. On Wednesday 2nd October I signed on with Ian Scholey for my checkout dive on what proved to be a fantastic day on the Bay. I was assigned to John Olden's spectacular 'Barcrusher' dive boat "Lil' Red" along with Andrew Qusted and Jeff Schmidt.

John runs a tight ship, everything in its place all ship-shape and Bristol fashion, just the way I like it. We ran out to the HURRICANE wreck off Rosebud, where the water temperature was a cool 13deg and quite acceptable viz at about 10M on the bottom. I was partnered with Andrew and we mooched around the remains of this old iron-hulled wreck, which has certainly flattened out since I last dived it in 1998.

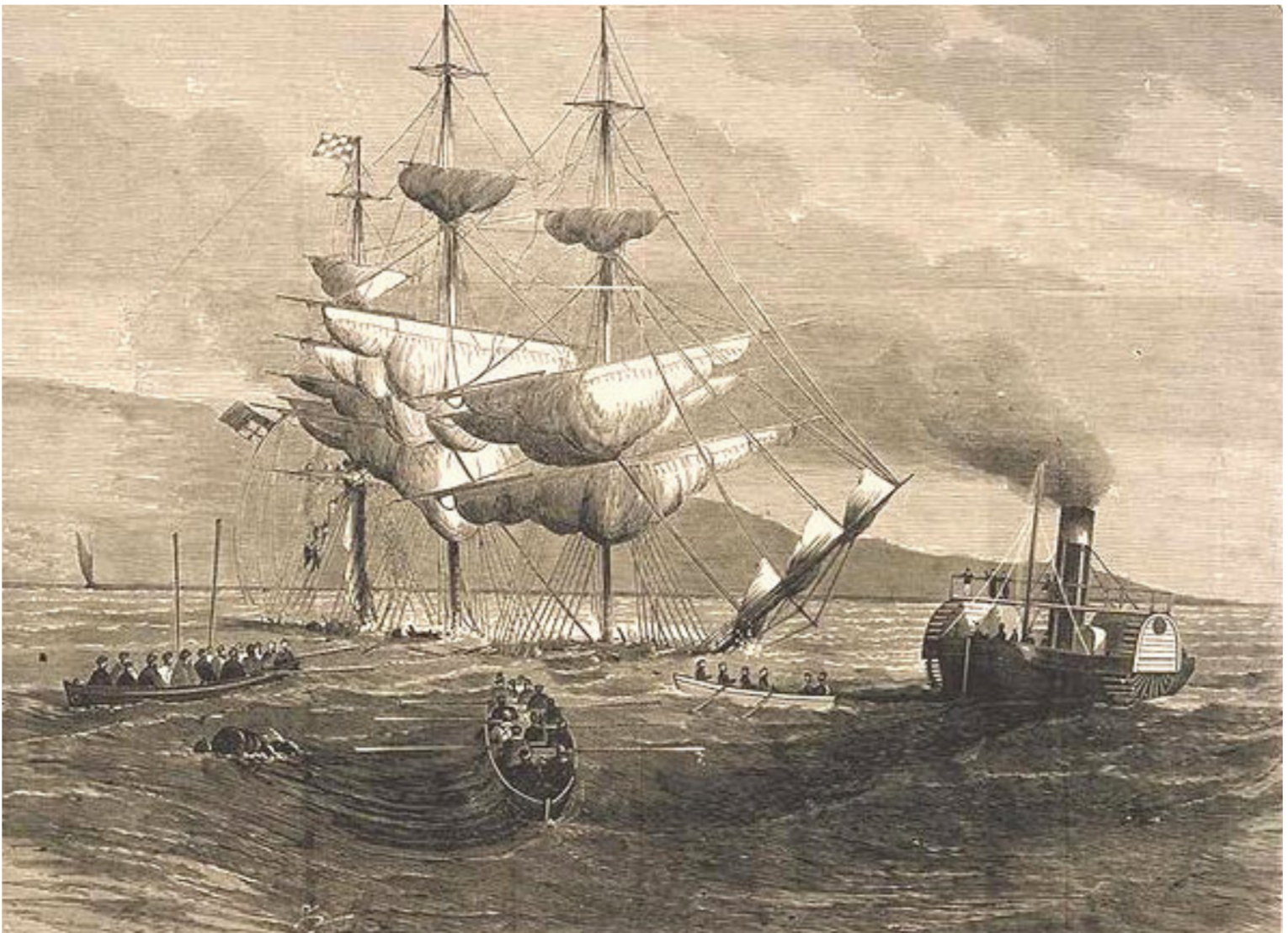
After descending the anchor line, Andrew laid out a guide line some 25M from the anchor until we reached the wreck. Our 55-minute dive was very enjoyable indeed, as there are so many fish species on the wreck,

we saw seahorses, leather jackets a' plenty, along with some weed fishes and a good-sized Port Jackson shark. Andrew won the battle with a very cheeky octopus which took great interest in his dive torch and snatched it, no doubt with plans to do some interior decorating in his lair. A container ship heading up to Melbourne around the nearby Hovell Pile, did send us a brief sand-storm which amazingly reached us in the outgoing tide, but apart from that, the viz was great.

We surfaced to enjoy a hot cuppa (thanks Andrew) and lovely warm spring sunshine on a glassy sea. Ah, is there a better place to be on a lovely Spring Day, than on the water?

My thanks to Andrew, John, Jeff and Ian (in his speedy Rib) for a most excellent day back out with the VSAG. I did not do the second dive in the shallows off Mt. Martha, but the rest of the lads enjoyed a good hour photographing critter and exploring some new reef.

My mind did cast back to some of the history associated with the wreck of the HURRICANE, a dive site which has been visited many times by VSAG divers over the decades. Following the wrecking of the vessel back in 1869, salvors did recover a great deal



1908 AA Hurricane & tug Hercules - Source: State Library

Return to the Hurricane cont.

of her cargo before she was dismantled by helmet divers. Then for many years she lay in peace providing a spectacular fishing site during the schnapper season for fishing clubs from as far afield as Ballarat, in the early 1900s.

In 1908, the famous old helmet diver and scrap metal scrounger George Beckett, applied and received a permit to blast the HURRICANE to recover copper and brass fittings. During 1908 Beckett spent most of the year visiting the ENA wreck at St. Leonards, and the HURRICANE, SCHOMBERG and FALLS of HALLADALE, to recover scrap metals. Some snippets from contemporary newspapers follow:

From The Melbourne AGE - Monday 17th Feb 1908 - DIVING FOR COPPER.

PORTARLINGTON, Sunday. Diver Beckett is at present diving for copper from the hull of an old vessel wrecked in the early days alongside the St. Leonards, pier. He has been successful in recovering a large amount of copper.

There was quite an outcry in the press of February 1908 at Beckett's plans to blast such a fine schnapper fishing site as the HURRICANE. The following contemporary newspaper articles are quite revealing:

From The Melbourne AGE - 24th February 1908 - A GOOD HAUL OF SCHNAPPER.



A party of amateur fishermen, fishing at the Hurricane wreck on Thursday, had excellent sport, landing 12 schnapper, one of which turned the scale at 32 pounds (14kgs) and, combined with three other large ones, raised the beam horizontally at 90 pounds (41kgs).

From Geelong Advertiser - 24th February 1908 - GOOD CATCH OF SCHNAPPER, SOME BIG FISH.

QUEENSCLIFF, Friday. Some fine schnapper were caught yesterday off Rosebud, by Mr. McBean, a visitor, and two fishermen named W. Owen and G. Wayth. The haul included four fish weighing from 25lbs to 27lbs (11 to 13kgs) each. Rosebud, which is about 14 miles from Queenscliff, is regarded by local fishermen as being one of the best grounds for schnapper in the bay, and the men are displeased because permission has been obtained to blow up the wreck of the ship Hurricane, which lies off the coast there. The fishermen say that if the wreck is destroyed, as proposed, the vicinity will be effectually spoilt as a spawning ground, and they intend making a protest to the Minister.

I guess our local wreck-sites and fishing haunts have been subjected to many interferences over the years, but fortunately time seems to eventually heal and the HURRICANE today is certainly a great place to hunt critters with a camera.

George Beckett

LOCAL DIVING

Rye Jetty

by *Peter Mosse*

Orange Camouflage

When diving Rye jetty I always wonder about the design of the diver entry point. Why do I have to walk past the entry point by about 50 metres, just to walk back again down the ramp and along the low-level platform? Is this some marine architect's perverse idea of getting back at divers for some deep-seated reason?



Anyway, on a recent dive under Rye jetty I happened to chance on an interesting phenomenon. Firstly, there were several large mosaic leather jackets with their classic blue lines with yellow and white shading and black patches. The number present in itself was noteworthy. In my experience they aren't that common.

And in orange camo!

But then I noticed something I had not seen before. A wildly different colour variant. Quite spectacular.

The fish was hanging very close to a pylon with bright orange sponge covering it. And the fish was also a matching bright orange and seemed determined to stay near the sponge covered pylon.

I was left wondering how quickly it could revert to its original colours. But it was interesting to note a goatfish (red or sand mullet) resting on another orange sponge covered pylon. The fish was also distinctly orange. But unlike the mosaic leather jacket, it did swim off as I approached and promptly reverted to its more conventional colours.



DIVING SKILLS

Dive retrospectives: to-do or not-to-do?

by Sandrine Balbo

During the 2024-08 Scuba Workshop led by Peter Galvin, we discussed the content of a couple of PDFs by Peter Mosse and Peter Galvin - on the [VSAG website](#). These documents offer an extensive list of things to consider in the days leading up to a dive and on the day itself. In this short article, I want to focus on the day of the dive.

I'm drawing on Peter Mosse's quiz answers and the retrospective format we use in my workplace, based on the 4Ls (Liked, Learned, Lacked, Longed For) framework.

I'll skip talking about the checks to be done prior, i.e. that the conditions are right—tides, wind, weather, swell, currents, location, parking, meet time, and calm waters all checked off. So, here we are, parked at Rye Pier, ready to dive. According to Peter Mosse's quiz, we still needed to cover a few key points:

1. Diver Qualifications & Experience

This was briefly discussed, but in a very relaxed manner. Since it was a shore dive, we were all comfortable with each other's experience level.

2. Maximum Depth

I had assumed we'd dive between 2-6 meters based on my Google search the night before. I needed to be sure whether the 150 bars left in my tank would be enough. After a quick chat with my buddies, James and Stevo, we agreed it would be fine.

3. Entry

I had assumed we'd enter from the beach, but when I met my buddies at the end of the pier, I realised we would be entering from the jetty instead. Thankfully, my buddies had space in their trolleys, so they helped carry my gear (since they had dived this pier before).

4. Equipment Requirements

Since this was a fish count dive, we had our tablets ready. No issues here.

5. Deco or Non-Deco Dive

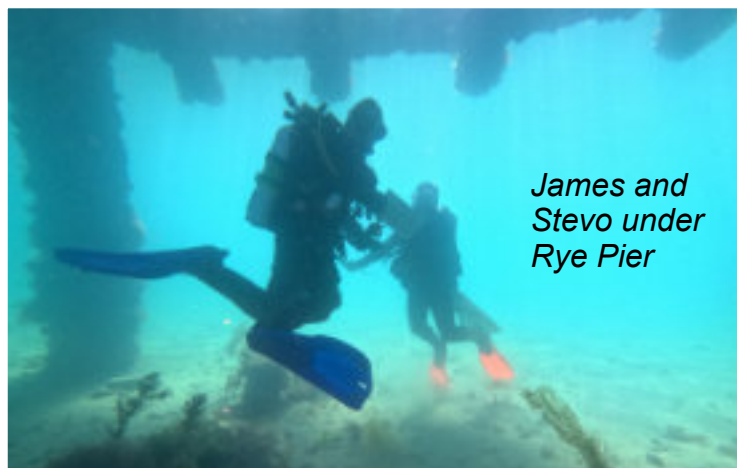
At 6 meters, it was a non-deco dive. However, we didn't explicitly discuss this.

6. Emergency Procedures

These weren't discussed. It's something we should revisit in the future, discussing what First Aid Kits we have and what could go wrong on the dive.

Liked:

The dive was fantastic. Both Stevo and James were super relaxed, and we enjoyed sharing what we saw, especially the octopi. They're my favourite animal.



James and Stevo under Rye Pier

Learned:

Having a quick discussion about the small details beforehand can really help ease the dive and make it even more enjoyable.

Lacked:

Leadership and Dive Coordination: We didn't establish who would lead or close the group. Although this was a shallow dive, it left me feeling uncertain at times. When my buddies veered off in different directions, I wasn't sure who to follow. I stayed put, trying to keep both in view.

Air Consumption Communication: Would it have been helpful to let my buddies know when I reached 30 bars? While under, James asked me to notify him when I reached 50 bars. I agreed to notify him at 30 bars, which he was fine with. I would've done this anyway, as it's the old "reserve air" signal (a fist on the temple) we used before pressure gauges became standard.

Dive Depth: James mentioned the Octopus Garden before we entered the water, but I wasn't aware it was at 10m until we got closer. With my new GoPro (without a case yet), I started to feel uncomfortable since I knew the camera's depth limit was 10 meters. Fortunately, we didn't exceed that, so I didn't have to explain why I couldn't go deeper.

Longed For:

Better Gear Planning: I wish I had known that I'd need to carry my gear to the end of the pier. If I had, I would've brought my trolley for the tank. Luckily, my buddies were well-equipped and helped me out.

GoPro Awareness: Had I known we would dive to 10 meters, I might not have brought my GoPro.

A Debrief: I didn't realise how much the small things bothered me until I took time to reflect. Next time, I plan to ask my buddies to spend a few minutes debriefing after the dive—sitting and chatting about it will make the experience even more valuable and give me a chance to learn from them too.

Thank you Stevo & James for a great dive on that day, and for reviewing this article :-)

And thank you Peter Mosse, for suggesting I write this article. I hope it sparks some discussions. Could this be a potential topic for a Scuba workshop? Let me know!



Alor Island, Indonesia

by *Imogen Manins*

In December 2023, Stuart McGregor and I were sitting at the Flinders foreshore having just dived Flinders jetty. We'd been diving for just a couple of years and our hundred or so dives had all been in Victoria's beautiful bracing waters. We love shore diving in Victoria, like many VSAG members, we're unfazed by the water temperature and dive throughout the year with assistance of drysuits and hot chocolate. We're only human though, and have often looked wistfully at brochures and temptations of tropical waters.

In January 2023 I was fortunate enough to win 1st Prize in the Ocean Art photo competition (Compact Macro category), winning a trip for two people to Alami Alor dive resort. This came as a huge and exciting shock. We typed the location into Google Maps to find out where on earth this place was! We found the island of Alor in the famous Coral Triangle in the west of the Indonesian archipelago, just north of Timor.

The Journey

Excited to plan our trip, we started sketching out a travel plan with the help of information on the Alami Alor website. There is just one domestic flight landing on Alor island each morning from Kupang which in turn, can be accessed by domestic flights the previous day from either Denpasar or Jakarta. After a couple of draft itineraries, we decided on an overnight stay in Bali followed by another layover in Kupang. With such an extensive commute both to and from Alor, we would love to have spent more time in the region, but work commitments hung over our heads.

We finally began our travels early one morning amidst the depths of Melbourne's winter. This was my first time packing underwater photography gear and I had meticulously planned how I was going to squeeze our dive gear and into the airline's luggage restrictions. While I was looking forward to warm weather I was for a few hours, grateful for Melbourne's sub 10 degree morning as I pulled on my oversized travel vest laden with batteries and other fragile gear that I didn't want included in my carry-on weight limit!

Finding out about the Ocean Art prize, we were thrilled that the prize was for two people, and while Stu may have assumed that as my partner he would be the person travelling with me, I enjoyed reiterating on multiple occasions that he had truly only clinched the position when he agreed to allow me to use most of his carry-on allowance for my valuable strobes and camera ports.



Alor Island, Indonesia cont.

International travel is exciting and tiring, and with each jump in temperature the anticipation grew. Two extravagant buffet breakfasts after we began our journey we reached the tiny airstrip at Alor island's Mali airport. Standing at the luggage carousel anxiously awaiting our cases of dive gear, we scanned the room, wondering which of these other passengers might be joining us at the resort. We noticed several people with fins strapped to backpacks, but most other passengers were Indonesian. We sighed with relief as both our cases of dive gear spun into view, and moments later were ushered by a man wielding a sign with our names, to an awaiting SUV. Another hour on rough roads from the airport, we travelled through small towns and villages to the southern side of Kalabahi Bay. We saw glimpses of water through thick vegetation and finally drove through the little village of Wolwal. Our driver moved patiently past pedestrians walking home after Sunday church service. Unlike in Denpasar and Kupang the car horn was left alone giving us a more peaceful final leg. Chickens scratched around carefully tended yards and we could see that



into the resort, we knew we were arriving somewhere special, and we were about to learn just how good the diving would be too, with insane critter-filled muck dives, densely packed reefs of hard and soft corals, dramatic colourful walls and enchanting caves.



Alami Alor Resort

Our trip package was for 7 days diving at the resort, all inclusive; a double boat dive in the morning, afternoon House Reef diving, and the option of a night muck dive off the boat in the bay. Alami Alor resort is positioned on the southern side of the long and skinny Kalabahi bay. It takes just 5 minutes or so for the modern dive boat travel across. The resort is literally carved out of the jungle, wedged between the Kalabahi Bay and thick vegetation on steep hills. There is no cultivated lawn, paved paths or formal gardens, instead the vegetation has been left alone as much as possible with tall trees and vines intact along the single stone path down which guests walk from dining/common area to the jetty. The position is sheltered from strong winds, and is a few hundred

great care was taken over the building of small brick and timber houses. As with the absence of impatient car horns, there was quite distinctly an absence of plastic rubbish on the streets. On the hot crowded streets of Bali and the growing city of Kupang in Timor was the pervasive impact of plastic litter and building rubble, evident along every metre of road, footpath, and property.

Alor has a charm that comes with remoteness. What you trade for a long commute is uninterrupted peace and a pristine environment that more popular and highly developed regions have long since lost. On our final leg

metres from Wolwal, one in a smattering of small villages on Alor where at least 15 different languages are spoken. Our hosts, resort managers Alexandra (UK) and Uri (Spain) head a team of absolutely charming local staff. With diving and tourism still very new to the area, the staff are the first generation in the industry and show this with enthusiasm in everything they do, from cooking guest meals to guiding dives.

As Uri and Alex greeted us and gave an orientation and briefing about the exciting days to come, we discovered that along with just three others on the same flight into Alor, we were as yet the only people at the resort, and

Alor Island, Indonesia cont.

would remain so for the next couple of days. We would later be joined by guests from Singapore, Malaysia, Poland and another couple from Melbourne (who had never dived in Victoria!).

Looking around the resort I felt such a sense of tranquility. Each structure is made of local natural materials - bare timbers, thatched roofs, open-air bathrooms with stone basins. Not a skerrick of plastic or garish bling, no colourful facades, no noisy bar, no background music or televisions. It is a place for those that are interested solely in spending time diving (or snorkelling) and then talking about diving. It was perfect for me, it was peace to the eyes and ears.



I had been concerned that we would feel oppressed by tropical heat and humidity, however the temperature did not cause any discomfort. Humidity was at a comfortable level and the sun was held at bay by the jungle canopy over the resort path, and the bungalow air-conditioning and fans.

Through the course of the week we sat at the common dining table for each meal, sharing platters of carefully prepared food for lunch and dinner, and ordering from an a la carte menu for breakfast. Not a hot chip or commercially prepared dish in sight. Hand-made serving dishes and plates all completed the organic atmosphere. All food was cooked in house, based on traditional Indonesian recipes, often with fish brought directly to the house reef jetty by local fishermen. Guilty chuckles became a regular sound from all of us as yet another freshly baked cake was offered, and accepted after every meal with hot coffee and tea.

After evening meals at the large communal table, Uri and Alex gave dive briefings for the following day. Having been asked about the particular type of diving we'd like to

do, forecast conditions had been taken into account and dive sites chosen. Each day we would leave at 8am from the jetty, just 30 metres from our bungalow. Morning dive sites were 10-20min from the resort, outside the bay. A pre-dinner night dive was also accessed by boat, usually a muck dive just 5 minutes away.

With two dive boats in operation, we were onboard with one other guest, our guide, a deckhand, captain and a small bounty of drinks and cake. Each morning after breakfast, we trotted via the camera room to the House Reef jetty. We slipped into thin wetsuits and boarded the boat, ready for departure. All dive gear was carefully organised and ready on the boat. This was all a real novelty for a couple of Melbourne divers. I placed my camera in my own crate in the centre of the boat and sat back, marvelling at the lack of work associated with diving. All I had to do was dive and look after my camera gear. Luxury!

Our boat would travel south-west out of Kalabahi Bay towards the island of Pura. The volcanic island rises steeply out of Alor-Pantar Straight through which strong currents flow with cooler upwellings from the south. The currents push nutrients and migrating marine species through this unique area.

We learned that in recent years a marine park has been created to protect the unique environment. Local men continue traditional fishing practices using hand made bamboo fishing nets or spears, and past practices by intruders of dynamiting had been eliminated several decades ago.

We kept watch for the spouts of whales and the fins of Mola Mola and dolphins. Just a few minutes after leaving the jetty on our first dive, the crew yelled in excitement as they spotted the huge puff from a Blue Whale's spout! For the next few days we would see a female Blue Whale with calf, as well as a pod of dolphins alongside our boat. We learnt to yell out in Bahasa, "biru!" at the sight of a whale.



Alor Island, Indonesia cont.

Reef, Wall and Cave Dives in Alor-Pantar Strait

We had several dives at various sites off the volcanic island of Pura where our vessel would pull up just off shore, bobbing about in the calm blue water. At some dive sites the adjacent shore was thick with jungle and no sign of development. At other times the site would be at the doorstep of a village. We could see children playing and waving to us, men high up in coconut trees, harvesting branches and chickens and roosters roaming across dirt paths. Buildings were built of local materials, a power line dangled high across the village - a school, a church, small huts. In the near distance was the smaller island of Ternate around which sunny skies and a light breeze rocked outrigger canoes awaiting locals. We peered over the side of the boat into crystal clear water. At about ten metres depth we could see an enormous amount of hard and soft corals.

On the count, 1, 2, 3 - Backwards into we would fall into the clear water. Cameras passed down to awaiting arms. Good to go? Down we went. Our guide, Kadir, was quickly at the edge of the reef, waiting for us so we could together descend down the steep wall. It was hard to bypass the incredible life on the reef and go straight to the wall, but that opportunity would come later.

Just three of us, along with Kadir, glided down to 25m. As a diver in Melbourne I've always been interested in learning the names of the marine life I come across and have gradually become able to identify most things. While I understood the broad families of what I was looking at here, the tropics were totally new to me and I knew I was later going to be spending hours looking up all these new creatures. I'd never seen anything like these glorious walls. 'Babylon' was the name of this first one. Large Gorgonian fans and spiral whip corals jutted out from the wall. Enormous barrel sponges floored me as they came into view in 30+ metre vis.



As an Alor local, Kadir learnt to dive with the owners of the Alami resort and these were his waters. He was a highly skilled critter-spotter and was constantly pointing out many fabulous creatures. Scorpionfish, Moray eels, Lionfish, Nudibranchs, crabs and shrimp. I had chosen a fisheye lens for the wall dives and I was looking for potential CFWA (Close Focus Wide Angle) scenes - big scenes with a close focus subject. I was overwhelmed with choice and thrilled every time my strobes lit up a scene to reveal the full colour.

Conditions above and below the surface were ideal on every dive, with excellent visibility along the walls. The current was minimal and glancing out into the open water, we hoped to catch a glimpse of larger fish, sharks or whales, but no such luck. We spent around 45 minutes on these wall dives, returning gradually to the reef at around 10 metres. For the final stage of the dive we enjoyed examining the the many hard and soft corals, large beautiful sea stars, Feather Stars and schools of fish.



Alor Island, Indonesia cont.

Although we had been concerned about being too hot wearing 5mm wetsuits in 28 degree water, we were comfortable after two dives of 60-70 minutes and ready to peel off the upper torso and enjoy our surface interval drink and cake.



Local Fishing Traditions

For most dives in the Alor-Pantar Straight we would spend around 45 minutes on the wall before returning gradually to finish the dive on the reef at around 10 metres. On these stunning reefs close to the villages of Pura island we were also fortunate to observe the use of traditional fishing nets called 'Bubu'.

On Pura island, fishermen gather materials from the hills and mountains to craft the nets and I was fortunate enough to observe a man spear fishing and a villager working with his Babu as I snorkelled on the final day. The fisherman carried his net to the water, attaching it to a canoe and paddled out to get some depth over the reef. Wearing just shorts and goggles made of glass and wood, he dived down with the large trap, carefully positioning and making it secure between corals with rope and rocks. The nets are around 2 metres long and nearly a metre wide at the mouth. They are completely hand woven, with a central tapering cylinder through which fish swim and become trapped.

The Bubu symbolises the traditional way of life for the people of the Alor region, reflecting changes that are occurring even in remote villages such as this one. I saw several fishing traps on the reefs, all made from local materials, but modern elements have crept in to the customary design, with synthetic rope now being employed to tie sections together. I was delighted to find one Bubu still in use on the reef at the edge of Pura, crafted entirely from traditional materials.

Wolang Caves

Aside from the spectacular wall dives, we were keen to have the chance to dive Wolang Caves off the island of Alor. The day came with calm enough conditions at the mouth of the cave and so the opportunity was grabbed. This would be the only time during our stay at Alor that

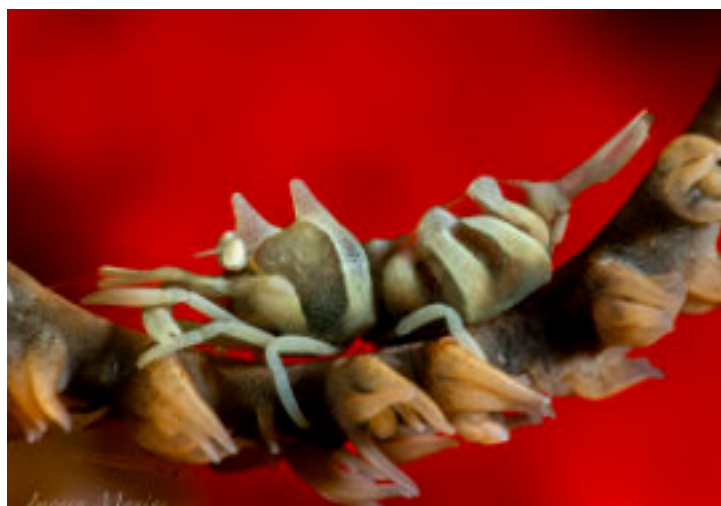
we saw another boat at the same dive site. The waters through Kalabahi Bay and the Alor-Pantar Straight are very quiet, with mainly individual fishermen in hand-crafted outriggers and local residents commuting between islands on less than salubrious water bus. There are two other dive operations in the vicinity, and care is taken not to dive the same sites concurrently.

The first of two Wolang caves is accessed through a large entry point at 12 metres. Looking back to the entry from inside the cave is spectacular. In this first section, we surface into an air pocket, exclaiming our excitement and searching around the cave ceiling somewhat apprehensively, keeping an eye out for forewarned sea snakes. We descend once more, examining under ledges, discovering many crayfish, sea fans, anemones and a resting nurse shark. Exiting the cave we are guided to a second cave entrance a short distance away, with schools of Soldierfish a bounty.

Muck diving / night dives in Kalabahi Bay

A few minutes after dropping into the dark water and poking around in the grey volcanic sands of Kalabahi Bay I was a convert to this thing called 'muck'. Kadir is an accomplished macro critter-finder and no sooner had I finished photographing one subject, he was ready to point out another. For me, this was a new way of diving and photography which allowed me to focus on refining my shots rather than searching haphazardly for subjects in an unfamiliar environment. I'd acquired a totally new camera system in the months leading up to the trip, and had added an extra piece for macro photography only a couple of dives ago. Here I was able to put it to good use! To my surprise, I came away from these dives with a new love of shrimp! Finding and photographing these tiny colourful creatures living in symbiosis with whip coral or extravagantly coloured fire anemones was immensely satisfying and gave me a whole list of new animals to identify and read about once back at the resort.

The weird and wonderful Rhinopia fish was on my bucket list for this trip, and on day one, there it was - no, wait - two! Two strange bright yellow creatures nestled in next to sponges of their exact likeness. The were bigger than I had expected, and barely fit in the frame of my macro lens.



Alor Island, Indonesia cont.

Later that evening, surrounded by marine reference books, cool drinks, our hosts, and the now five other diving guests, we were eager to hear what those accustomed to tropical waters thought about the muck diving. Many of them had extensive experience in renowned muck diving destinations around the world. To our delight, they seemed just as blown away by the incredible variety of critters as we were.



One of the pleasures of being at this resort was talking to the other guests during meal time. With such an intimate group of new friends, we were easily able to exchange stories over the dining table and in the open-air lounge area in the evening. We enjoyed sharing our love of Melbourne's cold water diving and the quality of our boat and shore dives. The common area of the resort has a beautiful small pool surrounded by timber



decking and vegetation. In the evening microbats flit around making sure that mosquitoes don't cause too much angst.

We tried hard to give ourselves down time, but with the opportunity to dive four times a day, eat amazing food and keep the camera gear in good condition, there wasn't a lot of time to do nothing. We did enjoy sitting on the deck looking out over Kalabahi Bay where mosques and churches sit side by side at each village. The call to prayer drifting across the water created such a beautiful atmosphere and is one of my favourite memories. On Sunday morning the Wolwal church rang it's newly acquired bells for the first time. Every evening the sunset was like a painting of perfect pinky orange clouds and blue sky. We hope to return to Alor. There are so many destinations around the world to tempt us and like many divers, we want to experience many new and different things. But something tells me that this place is one to come back to, and before it becomes too popular as surely it will.



DIVING SKILLS

Being an Independent Diver

by Stan Bugg

Some will claim it is sacrilege for me to say it, but I believe all divers should strive to conduct their dives independent of other divers, irrespective of their level of training, or the type of diving they are doing.

Before you get your speedos in a twist, I am not implying that they are diving solo, or that there is no buddy. Nor am I saying that they must refuse any assistance from a partner. It merely affirms that ALL divers, regardless of their experience and/or training, should have the skills, knowledge and mindset to be capable of looking after themselves in most circumstances.

The buddy then becomes a genuine backup, and not the primary solution to problems that many naively expect the buddy to be.

We call this state solo independent. It is the recommended mindset of technical divers and cave divers. Being solo independent assumes that you are taking responsibility for your safety, and not just hand-balling it to your companion.

While diving's safety protocols call for the presence of a buddy, many other risky pastimes do not. Rock climbers, pilots, hang gliders, bushwalkers, all routinely go solo, and assume that they will deal with any difficulties encountered. If problems arose in these activities, they would not reject an offer of help from another person, but the mind set is not geared towards an assumption that a buddy will automatically bail you out of trouble.

So I am urging divers to adopt a similar mind set; without actually doing away with the buddy, you up-skill yourself to a point where you are not totally reliant upon assistance from that partner, and if his/her ability to help you is diminished, you can still get yourself sorted out.

There are no new skills that are required to be considered solo independent. I merely call on the diver to be truly capable of performing all of the skills that they learned in their basic diver training. It also assumes the diver is totally honest when assessing his/her own capabilities.

So how do you measure up?

If you can answer YES to the ALL of the statements below, you are well on the way to being considered an independent diver:

- I am able to gear up without assistance.
- I can check my gear prior to a dive, to ensure it is functioning correctly.
- I can plan a series of dives, taking into account depth, time, deco obligations, air consumption.
- Once underwater, I can implement this plan, and not exceed prescribed limits. I can read and use deco tables or computer to calculate deco obligations for a multi dive schedule.
- I know my personal limits, and I plan and execute my dives to ensure that I do not exceed these limits. I am prepared to "CALL" a dive if I do not feel comfortable with conditions, equipment, dive limits, or anything else that causes me discomfort.
- I constantly monitor my air, and when I reach my air cutoff, I call the dive. communicate constantly with others in my group while underwater.
- I have control of my buoyancy throughout a dive. I have the ability to hover mid water without needing a shot line, or other physical reference point.
- I am capable of making a controlled ascent, including a safety stop or two. When I surface, I am able to make myself positively buoyant and comfortable.
- I can remove and replace my gear while in the water.
- I do not blindly accept other divers imposing their dive plan on me.
- I can surface snorkel 200m while wearing SCUBA
- I accept total responsibility for ME while I am diving. If my actions cause things to go wrong it is MY fault.

Stan Bugg and John Lippman presented at the VSAG Rescue diver refresher course - 30th November 2024.



John Lippman presenting - Image taken By Brian Heatherich

PHOTO COMPETITION

Winner

June 2024



Tim Forster - Crescent Tail Big Eye - Palau

PHOTO COMPETITION

Winner

September - 2024



Elodie Camprasse - Nudi party - Sorrento

PHOTO COMPETITION

Winner

October 2024



Erhan Onfidan - Fear My Cuteness - Rye

PHOTO COMPETITION

Winner

November 2024



Elodie Camprasse - Happy Halloween - Rye pier

PHOTO COMPETITION

Winner

December 2024 & Overall 2024 Winner



Peter Mosse - Flight of the eagles - Yongala



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

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

Other equipment available for short-term loan includes:

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

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

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

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

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

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

For any further questions or requests, please contact John Olden.

Emergency Contact Information

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

000

or call the Water Police on 1800 135 729

In the event you cannot place a call, use

VHF Channel 16

and follow the Radio Emergency Message Protocols shown below.

If all of the above fail, activate your

EPIRB

Radio Emergency Message Protocols

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

Speak slowly and clearly

Mayday call

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

Distress call

Mayday, Mayday, Mayday

this is

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

Distress message after call has been acknowledged

Mayday

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

Vessel position (GPS, bearing, what3words)

Nature of distress and assistance required

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

Pan Pan call

An urgent situation exists but there is no imminent danger

Urgency call

Pan Pan, Pan Pan, Pan Pan

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

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

Urgency message after call has been acknowledged

Pan Pan

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

Vessel position (GPS, bearing, what3words)

Nature of distress and assistance required

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

VSAG Committee & Club Roles 2025

President - Andrew McKernan

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