

ANUSC CLUB NEWSLETTER MARCH 1992

Despite the time of year, when most of our members are either skiing or toasting marshmallows in front of a fire, we've been diving (the best dives are always in winter).

Here are some tales to encourage you to check over your gear and start thinking about getting wet again.

The Pompey trip (edited highlights):

The trip began from Gladstone when the group started to assemble around noon. Sixteen hundred kilometres from Canberra even the quick way through the back-blocks of NSW and Queensland takes a while. Some of us had come up the coast over four days, doing some diving at Seal-Rocks near Forster on the way, another couple had made the trip on a motorbike, so it was good to finally arrive. Some of the group I knew quite well, and had dived with on a number of previous trips away. These were a seasoned bunch, veterans of Palau, New Guinea, Gizo and other tropical exotica. Some of the others were new faces (to me) with a range of experience. Two travelling Britishers, fresh from an open water course in Terrigal NSW, completed the party so that we were 15 divers and 3 crew.....

..This was to be our first drift dive of the trip, and it was like having liquid dynamite in our veins. In we went, and immediately were dragged off by the current. We were flying at breathtaking speed, with the wall angling down from right to left. Groups quickly formed, some holding hands to stay together. Buddy Chuck and I got separated but I saw him above and behind team up with some of the others. I latched onto a group and we angled down. At the speeds we were going it was easy to cruise along the scoured coral wall and get glimpses of the life hiding in caves or behind rock outcrops. I did a quick dip down to 109 ft just to check the wall down there. There were big overhangs from ~100 ft but I didn't get a chance to duck into them on the way past. Maybe next time. Back up to the group I was with and as I was looking down to see a clown triggerfish in a cave I noticed three medium/large Black Whalers eyeing us off. They cruised effortlessly past us into the current (4-5 knots) and then circled back, maybe 15 metres away. I'm sure they were wondering what strange things we were but they left us alone. Jann and some of the others noticed some more of these sharks above us at the same time. They all stayed with us for quite some minutes before fading off into the distance. The turbulence was something we had to watch continually. Suddenly the whole group would get sucked down 10 metres before we had a chance to re-equalise buoyancy, and then we would get suddenly caught by an upwelling and flung upwards, hands pulling our dump valves and computers bleeping at our rapid ascent. What a ride! The ultimate roller coaster, and 30 minutes worth! After the designated 30 minutes we came up to a waiting boat and a worried Captain. We were one diver down. Everyone rushed to the top deck and suddenly Guy was spotted, thanks to his bright pink fins, nearly a kilometre upcurrent. He'd been separated from the group early and had not made the same speed as everyone else. Fortunately his fins were very visible as he kept an eye on six sharks below him. Everyone breathed a sigh of relief as he was picked up: you don't get too many chances out in this wild section of the reef.....

...The third dive for the day saw the boat turn left at the top of the "Tee" and head to Reef Queen Lagoon. This was not a coral atoll lagoon, but more a gap in a large section of reef leaving a protected area. The coral colours here were magnificent, and the small fish life matched this. Chuck and I swam off ahead of the main bunch and managed to find two medium (1 metre) Maori Wrasses, one of which went and hid deep in a tiny cave, and 2 white-tip reef sharks. We followed the reef edge down finding red fan coral growing like shrubs on a bushy hillside. A big clown trigger fish on the edge of a canyon on the way back and a very pretty nudibranch, Morose Tambja. We kept the dive fairly shallow and short as we didn't want too much residual nitrogen in our systems, especially before the Blue Hole the next morning. As it was I had over 16 hours up at the end of the dive. Many people did a night dive later that day, but the rest blew off N₂ and contemplated what the morrow would bring.....

...The next day was back at the hole. I had been talking with Ron and could tell he wanted to go down deep. After much discussion we agreed to buddy up: dive plan was to 70 metres (on his metric computer, you've probably noticed mine is in feet - what I learnt in), check air and deco time, then see if the bottom was

visible and descend to it if everything checked out. We also took heed of the previous dive and planned to make a slower descent, keeping our BC's just short of positively buoyant with exhaled air. It was a perfect dive. We spiraled down to the depths, much as before, but watching very carefully our buoyancy. We slowed at 70 m and checked our comps and gauges; very powerful narcosis again. The bottom came into view as we drifted slowly down to towards 80 m, check with Ron - down? - yes. We touched, and Ron triumphantly grabbed a handful of sand and let it fall through his fingers, 84 metres on his computer. Computers and gauges within limits, up. A little puff of air into the BC, right arms linked, and we finned slowly up. The bottom didn't grab us this time, and we slowly rose out of the abyss. The visibility upwards was excellent and we could see the narrowest part of the hole siluetted against the lighter blue of the upper section as we rose up. Into the upper section of the hole and we spiralled around, blowing off deco time and checking out the phenomenal structure of the place as we climbed. A nice slow ascent, then out onto the sand and over to a convenient coral outcrop for the last bits of the deco. Still over 20 minutes of this needed, but we blew this off and 5 mins more and still came up with about 40-50 bar and a full pony. The Barrier Star Blue Hole, a star indeed.....

...Day 5 saw us moving back towards the Swains, a group of reefs east of the Tee-line stem. There was a general trend towards more cyclone damage on the shallower parts of the reef, but deeper things were still pretty much intact. Not as dramatic as the Tee-line but still very good diving country. The first dive was on 21-178 reef, we followed a rubble wall down to 137 ft, then slowly ascended. The coral was very pretty in patches, and coral trout were everywhere. After the dive we fished and speared (on snorkel) enough for the pot. On to 21-183 reef, the snakes were thicker here. Now they were also amorous, entwined and licking at each other. Highlights were a young Blue Angelfish, still showing half of its juvenile colours (the iridescent blue bands) around its perimeter, and a nice well fed white-tip reefie. On to 21-441 reef, shallow but very varied, good diving. I was down with Jann and Mick and we didn't see too many snakes but there were lots of lovely little fish. One was something not listed in the books, some sort of black Goby, most similar in shape to the Sailfin Goby. After a while we started to look at the sand for good uninhabited shells. This shell grovel became a bit of a competition, and then we saw what had to be worlds biggest painted cray. The antennae were what first caught my attention. They were each well over a metre long and then when I saw the size of the body I couldn't believe my eyes.... ...The night dive on this reef was not too interesting, although we saw a nudibrach which is supposed to be uncommon (Dusky Nembrotha). Mick went home early to open the red wine.....

...Jann, Mick, Chuck and I dived down through staghorn coral rubble to a fairly ordinary bottom at 70 feet. We were just about to turn back when we found ourselves suddenly being circled by two groups of fish. Around 40-50 big six band trevally came in close and moved clockwise around us and just a little further out a large number of fusilliers were circling in the other direction. Quite a sight. On the way back we came across a stunning juvenile pinnate batfish, black with a brilliant orange edging on the circumference.....

...Up and then on to 21-454 reef. Lots of cyclone damage but still some big fans and lots of fish - a white-tipped reefie, some yellow boxfish, a big bat fish and two big cowries with their mantles out. I finally overcame my fear of sea snakes and began to handle them. I was quite surprised how easy this was. They don't suddenly turn around and bite you, but remain fairly rigid and the whole body can be pushed along without bending. I was very pleased at this discovery. I could now push them out of the way and swim on. Others perfected the buddy cross-over, a manoeuvre in which a tailing sea snake is transfered to your buddy.....

...An absolute highlight was almost under the boat. Jann and I had gone down, fairly shallow ~ 50ft, and had found a cave under a large coral outcrop. In the cave were 3 big painted crays, sitting side by side. We quietly moved up to a few metres away and watched them for some minutes. They seemed to be watching us as well. I reached out my ungloved hand towards them and held my index finger out. The cray on the left slowly came out of the cave and then reached its antennae across to my hand and rubbed it against my outstretched finger. Contact! Twice the cray did this and then retreated back into the cave. That was an amazing feeling, almost as though they'd discovered strange aliens and had tried to communicate. Jann and I exchanged amazed looks and then continued on with the dive, another 60 minute job and then up to get to the next reef. Surprise Reef was a very pretty dive. We had been assured that "the snakes would be like

spaghetti" and they were there in abundance. I played with half a dozen with my new found confidence, and Jann, Mick, Vicki and I ambled on for a very pleasant, easy dive.....

...Apart from 5 big barracuda and 3 turtles, some juvenile axil pigfish and a 10 cm nudibranch with a lime green stripe on its back that we couldn't identify, the highlight was the turnaround point of the dive. Ron and Jann and I were on the bottom just starting to swim back after signalling half-time when a school of literally 100's of big golden trevally appeared swimming straight for us. They parted around us and then began to circle clockwise as even more kept arriving. The three of us just sat there amazed as we were surrounded by a living wall of fish, almost close enough to touch. They circled for maybe a full minute then suddenly peeled off and kept following their original course. Quite an exhilarating experience.....

•From the editor's archives "Fat Tanks and Full Bellies" © JJW 1992.

Jervis Bay

I only got one dive in this time, having arrived on Sunday to find the group discussing the fantastic visibility, and the dive at Crocodile Head the day before. Only a small number had braved the weather, and it was a very relaxed day. Most wanted to try the North end of Bowen Island, 20-30 m and a pleasant easy dive. The water was crystal clear and everyone had a very nice time. After returning, Phil and I cruised south to Stoney Creek, set up his new 13 metre long second stage hose onto a spare tank, rigged a crossover line and drifted down the anchor line. Virtually no current and crystal clear visibility, easily 30-40 m. The huge rock blocks on the edge of Stoney were visible from afar as we went down. A well planned deco dive, with stunning soft corals, impressive scenery and lots of fish, even a few stray butterfly fish. I realize now why this is regarded as one of the best dives in Australia.

Montague Island

A good turnout this weekend saw the new club flotilla in action. Ten divers at a time!! The sharks (harmless grey nurses) were at home and on the last day the water suddenly cleared giving magic vis. We had lots of dives this weekend, and the conditions were good enough to try the canyons on the far side of the island, in addition to the usual shark gutters and places like the bubble cave. For me, the sharks were definitely the attraction, but there were lots of fish for the photographers Eric and Raphael, and even a chilly Moorish Idol swept down from the North. Raphael claims to have seen a shark that wasn't a nurse, but it left him alone. We finally got to eat at the pub at Tilba, after trying for over a year and always finding it closed: pity the food didn't live up to the wait.

Musgrave Island

It happens every year

As Jeremy couldn't find anyone else he -- in his position as club president -- forced Irene and me to write a "short" report on the annual club trip to Lady Musgrave Island.

En route to Gladstone, which is a very long way indeed, Mark was worried about the food supplies on this desert island. Unfortunately the Subaru of Kristina didn't enjoy hunting Kangaroos in the dark, and so Mark and Kristina had to join Norm and Michelle for the rest of the trip. We really looked forward to the journey on the small Voyager over the rough sea. But the story was different this year. Graham had a second, bigger and better boat and we had the pleasure of the first trip on it (remember the hot pipe!). We had to stop three or four times to fix the steering wheel o-ring which gave Kari and Michelle oily dreams. Apart from that it was a very pleasant journey. Due to the delays, we arrived four hours late -- at low tide. Nevertheless unloading was not too bad, only we were missing a slab of beer afterwards (cheers to the Bell-Divers). The tents were set up -- and soon the first night dive was planned. This became a ritual during the two weeks, especially due to Michael's unrelenting efforts. The first morning dawned with memories of last year, because the TINNY had to be rescued. It was not a big deal though. From now on the boat sat safe on the beach for most of the time and served as a welcome pastime for some experienced mechanics. The reflectors on the DOUTS' boat inspired Michael (again) to suggest useful accessories for the TINNY. Reflecting arrows on the side to show which way is up -- 24hrs a day. As the DOUTS (Divers of the University of Technology Sydney- Ed) are mentioned already, we have to say something about Volleyball. Beach-Volleyball is always a nice diversion from other, stressful activities on an island like Lady Musgrave.

The tight schedule of the DOUTS' allowed them to play between 4pm and sunset. After two or three games an interstate test match was organised. Due to the poor play of the DOUTS and the fact that we had several players in our team with experience in the ANU competitions, we were assured of an easy win. Do we really have to mention that we were absolutely thrashed and some players were sent home to practice their serving?

Eating was the central activity and all the cooks put a lot of effort into preparing mouthwatering dinners that will be remembered for years. A few members of the group were competing in getting as many "seconds" as possible. The strong wind that was blowing for some days even helped us to top up our kitchen supplies. Fishermen from a trawler, which couldn't leave the lagoon, were running out of beer. They approached Rod and he was able to exchange a **whole** slab of beer for only 12kg of prawns. We enjoyed them (the prawns!) for the rest of the holidays.

We know that not everything has been covered, e.g. a president who arrived by plane, thousands of birds we never saw, Eric's camera which worked this time and plenty of sharks dressed up as Spanish Mackerels. But it happens every year

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We had a club meeting on the 13th August and thought of a few underwater events for the next month or two.

August: NO DIVING - GO SKIING INSTEAD

We are also doing equipment maintenance and boat maintenance. Jeremy (2473173h) is doing some work on the black duck on the 24/5th Aug, Norm (h 2411281, w 2764) is working on the Cherokee on the weekend of the 5/6 September. Please RING them if you can assist.

August 27 (Thursday) MUSGRAVE REUNION

Norm and Michelle's place. If you hadn't heard of this it's cos our phone relays didn't work, but come anyway. 7pm, 20 Woolcock St, Watson. BYO best slides.

September 12/13 to 19/20 (during the Uni break)

Broughton Island

Phil has been planning this one for a while, and would like to get the numbers to make it worthwhile. So if you're interested, ring him ASAP to let him know.

Contact: Philip Herral

w 2976031

ah 2375175

October 3/4/5 (Labour day long weekend)

Montague Island

Siggy wants to see the seals again. In fact most of us would like to see Montague again at this time of year, with 100's of seals playing about. The grey nurses will have gone North by now and will stay there until later in the year, so you don't need to worry if you've got a thing about sharks! Montague has a range of dive-sites, some deep, with large underwater cliffs and prolific fish life (that's why the seals come here). Also, there are shallower areas near the island and just up from Mystery Bay if you would prefer that, or just play with the seals in shallow water! With 2 boats we can accomodate most types of diving. For the more adventurous, maybe we'll try for Auginish Reef.

National Park style camping at Mystery Bay (though this time we might leave our usual shady campsite and find something a bit more sunny!)

Contact: Jeremy

ah 2473173 (try first)

w 2495051

October 31/1 November

Jervis Bay

Run away from exam worries and have a relaxed weekend camping at Honeymoon Bay. In addition to the nicest campground in JB, there is good access to most of the good dive-sites. JB has everything you might want, shallow to deep, big boulders to sand; just see which way the wind blows. We haven't been to the

Arch in a while, and then the new sounder on the Cherokee should make finding middle ground a piece of cake. If we've got the marks for Steve's legendary Banks by then we might even try for there.

Contact: Jeremy (again!)

ah 2473173 (try first)

w 2495051

November 21 (and the day after)

The SCUBA Store Treasure Hunt and Great Inflatable Boat Race

Now an annual event, this is a lot of fun and a good way to meet other Canberra divers. There are prizes to be won and much merrymen to be had. We even do some diving. 100's of painted discs are hidden in shallow water off Bawley Point. For each one you find, you get a chance to win a prize in the draw that night. This follows the great inflatable race. Last year the black duck was leading until the snorkelling leg. After last year's sad loss, we're teaching Eric what Australian written 1's and 7's look like. This year we have an even better chance with the new boat (8 minutes from Fairfax to Musgrave!), and despite the unwritten rule that "the Callagari wins", we'll try again.

In the afternoon and on the Sunday we'll get a bit of diving done. The Boiler off Brush Is. is always popular.

Contact: Steve

w 2513134

ah 22512834

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NEXT CLUB MEETING

The Annual General Meeting

5th NOVEMBER (THURSDAY)

8pm Upstairs in the ANU STUDENTS UNION

If you'd like a possition on the committee, let Jeremy know.

After the boring bits we'll plan our summer diving so come and let us know what you want to do. Then view some tropical slides afterwards.

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GEAR ISSUE AND RETURN

(Thursdays only unless you arrange otherwise)

Remember, people will only attend if you contact them beforehand. Also, try to contact people at home. They need to work during the day to support their diving.

<u>Eric Wenger</u>	<u>Steve Harding</u>	<u>Kristina Sands</u>	<u>Michelle Karas</u>
2493641 (w)	2513134 (w)	2492222 (w)	2016327 (w)
2546874 (h)	2512834 (h)	2417812 (h)	2411281 (h)
10/9/92	20/8/92	27/8/92	3/9/92
8/10/92	17/9/92	24/9/92	1/10/92
5/11/92	15/10/92	22/10/92	29/10/92
3/12/92	12/11/92	19/11/92	26/11/92

In an emergency (only) call Jeremy.