



SEA BRAGGIN'

St George Scuba Club Newsletter

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LONG WEEKEND DIVING

Saturday 7 June

The weekend weather forecast out to sea was not the best. Boat dives had been cancelled. Kurnell was proposed as an option. Even when I picked up my filled tanks on Friday night, the shop challenged me with "have you seen the seas out there"?

Out to sea was full of white-caps, but the Leap was calm, and 7 divers took the plunge 15 minutes after low tide: Ken, Keith W, Bill, Michael, Kelly, Ron, and Gary D.

10m viz, and a nice gentle current, made for a very enjoyable and "cruzee" dive. Several seahorses, weedy sea dragons, small cuttlefish, an Angel shark, and an assortment of nudibranchs. Kelly also found a PPH. The exit at The Steps was probably one of the best I've experienced. The wind had died down, the sun was out, and there was minimal swell. A very nice dive.

Sunday 8 June

A similar weather forecast out to sea, so another Leap dive was planned. The wind was up, and seas at the Leap were also a bit more spirited. Ken, Maxine, Bill, Daniel, Michael, Ron and Donna jumped in around 30 minutes after low tide. Visibility was reduced to 5 or so metres, but it was another enjoyable hour-plus dive, pushed along by the tide. Sea dragons, many weedies, nudibranchs, and the ever-friendly Cod.

On Saturday I had been seeking advice from Ken on the finer points of navigation, for exactly when to head into shore, and several landmarks (sandmarks?) were pointed out during the dive. On Sunday, Ken charged me with the responsibility for finding them again and determining our exit point. This included a pre-defined hand signal for 'Keep the Faith' if I hadn't gone far enough. One navigation point was identified (and my celebratory dance underwater must have confused anyone but Ken) and I did need a bit of faith before heading into the shallows.

It was decided to quit while we were ahead and not attempt a Monday Leap dive as well. Thanks to all for a fun weekend's diving.

Bill Rowland



MV FEBRINA

Papua New Guinea

After spending a week at Loloata Island Resort near Port Moresby, I had a 6.15am flight to Hoskins on the island of New Britain, where I was met by the Walindi and FeBrina staff for the drive to Walindi Plantation Resort, where I would board the MV FeBrina. As the boat doesn't depart until about 4pm, the Walindi Resort handles all the luggage, and supplies a room and meals for the day. By prior arrangement you could (extra cost) do a double dive in the resort dive boats in Kimbe Bay.

Several boat guests were already sitting around waiting, and taking advantage of the world's slowest internet connection at the resort to make their last contact with the outside world for the next 10 days. I was supposed to be meeting Mike Scotland here, but he had arrived a day earlier and decided to go diving. Flight schedules in PNG make it very advisable to book well ahead to get where you want, when you want, and then it will probably be changed anyway. For this reason Mike had to stay overnight in Cairns, and then again in Walindi, before he could board the boat. Accommodation in PNG is very ridiculously expensive for what you get.



Anemone shrimp

The MV FeBrina departed on time, less one passenger who was stuck in Port Moresby, and was delivered by small boat the next day after we had done our first two dives. Mike and I shared a cabin and we had a load of laughs the whole trip. Captain Raabe has a real way with words. Too long in the hot tropical sun does things to you. Don't ever get him started on politics or you will listen to a tirade of abuse about everyone, in Australia and America.

Basically, except for the muck dives, all the briefings were "this is a bommie that is flat on top with steep walls, and a saddle to another bommie". We were always advised if there was coralliomorph (very nasty) at the site, current and strength, and where all the good stuff was. It was very smart to follow the two PNG legendary guides, namely Digger and Josie. Once they found out what your interests were, they would come and find you on a dive, and take you to something they had found. I am mainly into macro stuff, but they found things that I could barely see, let alone photograph.

First dive each day was at 6.30am, then breakfast, then dives at 9.30am and 11.30am, then lunch at 12.30pm, then dives at 3.30pm and the night dive at 6.30pm, then dinner when everyone was back. Mike's favourite quote for the trip was when one of the American women asked Josie "what time was the 11.30am dive?" Really, I would have guessed it was at 11.30am. Nitrox was available at extra cost, and it appeared that everyone took advantage of this. Needless to say you sleep very well at night after doing this day after day, so drinks and snacks were always on hand between dives to keep up your strength.

There were only three guests from the home team, plus a Japanese woman, a French woman, and four female and two male Americans. You very quickly figured out who you felt comfortable diving with, although basically you can do your own thing if you want. Mike spent a lot of time posing other divers in front of fans or soft corals, for an



Chromodoris



article he is writing for a dive magazine, and one funny sight I saw was when he was photographing a beautiful big anemone with resident clown fish, when one of the other divers landed two fins clean in the middle of the anemone. Some of the other people were still trying to grasp the concept of buoyancy control. Both Mike and I had issues with some of the other divers' competency in the water, and we told the other people, to no avail. Unfortunately a 25mtr boat has very few places to hide if there is any aggro, so it is best to tread carefully.



Soft Coral Cowrie

We left Kimbe Bay after a few dives and headed to the Witu Islands out in the Bismark Sea, and the weather was brilliant, with little or no wind, and glassy conditions on a flat sea. This lasted the whole trip, so even when we had finished at the Witu Islands, we overnight steamed to Father's Shoals and the boat hardly even rocked as we slept. At the Shoals we did some great diving with the Father and Son volcanoes smoking away as a scenery backdrop. There is no doubt about PNG, it has everything a diver could wish for. Excellent coral reefs, good walls covered with soft corals and big gorgonia fans, lots of fish, schooling barracuda, incredible muck dives, night dives and two pretty spectacular shark feeds from very close-up. I even managed to find pygmy sea horses all by myself on a fan at 34mtrs, then used most of my bottom time taking photos. Then it was back to the reef top to spend another 45 minutes looking for crabs, anemone shrimp and all the other stuff we go

there to see.

The night dives were good, and thankfully only one of the American guys, Mike and I went with Digger to find stuff, while all the others stayed on board for cocktail hour. There were flashes going off all over the place, and whenever anything spectacular was found we all took it in turns to capture the images, and helped each other setup shots. It was fun returning to the boat at the end of the dive while three or four silvertip sharks circled us as we did a safety stop under the stern ladder.

The crew on the boat were great and when you got out of the water, you took the reg off your tank to show you needed a fill, and your BCD is not taken off the tank until you are leaving for home. Cameras are washed for you,





and the crew will even put your fins and tank on for you while you just sit on the back platform at water level. Great for people who are incredibly lazy, or have back problems.

The cooking was taken care of by Jane and her two assistants, and was always excellent and varied, and wine was served at dinner as part of the trip cost. The room cleaning fairy had always been in our room by the time we finished our first dive, and the ensembles to the cabins had nice hot showers. There are not many holidays where you go barefeet for 10 days, but MV FeBrina is one of them.

Due to the ash in the air from the volcanoes at Rabaul and in the East New Britain Province, there are some of the most spectacular sunrises and sunsets you can possibly imagine, and it was nice watching these from the front deck before the early morning and night dives.

I have always thought that liveaboards give great bang for your bucks, but most people balk at the up-front cost, even though the only additions to be paid on the boat are alcohol or nitrox. Another major consideration is the absolute ease of the diving, and the access to reefs far out to sea with pristine growth. I did 40 dives during the trip, some of which were 90 minutes, and Mike being a man of steel, did another 4 or 5 more than me. I took 24 hours off before flying home, but he was backing up for a second 10 day trip, so he dived until we returned to the wharf.

All I have to do now is look through my photos and try to identify some of the beautiful creatures I saw, and wonder when I can do a repeat trip.

Ian Hittmann



Soft Coral Crab



Disguised Octopus



Signal Gobies



Shrimp on sea whip



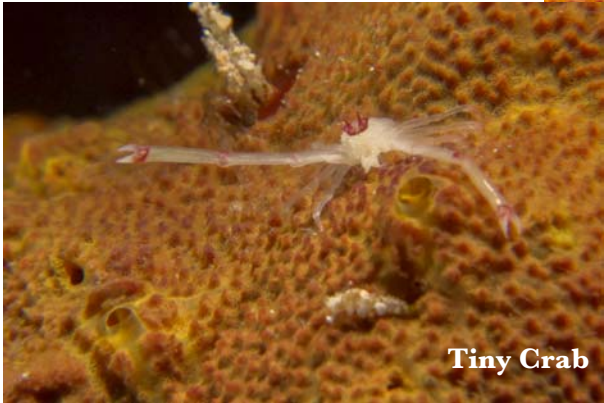
Goby



Soft Coral Crab



Chromodoris



Tiny Crab



Nudibranch



Crown of Thorns



Crab



Barracuda



Crab



SEA BRAGGIN'

THE ALMOST TIMOR TRIP

June 2014

Ken Ridley decided to book a trip back to Timor Leste this year, having gone last August and raved about it. About 5 people were interested but in the end it dwindled down to just Ken and I. The trip went something like this.

DAY 1 Saturday

Arrive at Sydney Airport at 8am with 30kgs of luggage and dive gear. Ken already in Darwin. Find out my flight has been canceled. Wait around with no information for 8 hours. Find out a volcano has erupted creating an ash cloud and no planes can fly. Go home. Long day.

DAY 2 Sunday

Still in Sydney. Multiple calls to various airlines, Dive Adventures and Timor accommodation. No answer. Still no information. Ken at Darwin airport ready to leave. Ken rings Dive Adventures, who say "what volcano?" Ken books flight home.

DAY 3 Monday

Still in Sydney. Airline credits flight. Pick up Ken from airport Monday night. We drink Coronas.

DAY 4 Tuesday

Still in Sydney. AirNorth return my call from Sunday and ask "how was my flight?" I resist the urge to get violent. Trip over.

Maxine Hayden

FIRST CLUB DIVE

My first dive was on LeScat, 27 March 2004 with Bruce Graham, Michael, Les, Barbara Sweetman and Heinz Bendinger to Cape Banks. It was an ok dive with schooling fish and 4 big rays.

Kelly McFadyen

South West Rocks

Fri 11 July – Sun 13 July 2014

A weekend trip up to South West Rocks - we have dived heaps with these guys and they are the best.

Here is the deal:

- 2 night / 4 dive package including 2 nights divers lodge accommodation
- continental breakfast
- four boat dives (double boat dive each day)
- use of tanks, weights and Nitrox
- Shared room/bunk accommodation \$320 per person
- Private/twin share accommodation \$360 per person
- Full equipment hire with dive package additional \$60

Please email me back if you are interested. Just getting numbers interested at present.

Also possible long weekend in Oct if interested.

Contact Ray Moulang

rayscases2@gmail.com



LOLOATA ISLAND RESORT

Port Moresby – Papua New Guinea

I had always heard about Loloata Resort and the reef and muck diving available so close to Port Moresby, so I thought I would stay there for a week on my way further north to Kimbe Bay.

I was met at the airport by one of the resort staff and immediately outside the airport we got into a peak hour traffic jam that would do Sydney proud. PNG is preparing to host the South Pacific Games, so major roads in the capital are being upgraded, causing absolute chaos. After negotiating the new and bigger potholes they seem to be making, we were soon on a small boat in the dark on the way across Bootless Bay to the resort. All my gear was taken to the dive shop and I was told a time to be on the wharf for my first dive, then it was off to dinner. Imagine when I walked into the dining area and see a long table with only one dinner setting, because I was the only guest in the whole resort. I had a very comfortable room with nice views, but it was at least a 15 minute walk from the dining room and dive shop. I sure got some walking done over the week.

After a leisurely breakfast (all meals are included) I went to the wharf at 8am to find all my gear was assembled and waiting for me on the boat, where I met my two guides / drivers for the week. Off we went in their 10 metre boat, but as soon as we left the protection of the island we ran straight into very strong winds from the SE trades. These winds blew 24/7 and caused very rough seas to slow progress. It also limited some of the dive sites we visited, but I couldn't complain about the quality of the sites at all, and it was certainly an adventure getting back on the boat with a camera after each dive. The guides could both find good stuff for my macro lens and who doesn't enjoy wearing a 3mm suit in 28 degree water?

The first dive was at The End Bommie and within a few minutes of descending we found a large green Lacy Scorpionfish (*Rhinopias aphanes*) just sitting out in the open. Unfortunately my lens could only capture the front half of this beautiful creature. About 20 minutes later we found a green and a brown one together. These fish are not exactly common, but already we had seen three of them. Lots of good nudies on the walls which drop off to about 38m, as well as gorgonian fans, crinoids, pink sea whips and soft coral trees of all colours. The reef top has staghorn corals and heaps of fish. Back on the boat for the surface interval there were tropical fruits and home made biscuits to have with soft drinks or coffee / tea.

The second dive was on a purpose sunk 25m steel trawler wreck, the MV Pai II. It was covered in growth and fish swirled around as I easily found plenty to photograph. This site is somewhat



Lacy Scorpionfish (*Rhinopias*)



Phyllidiidae nudibranch



protected so I figured I would be diving it more than once, and not having nitrox available reduced my bottom times.

After lunch back at the resort I organised an afternoon dive and it was still blowing a gale as we headed for another wreck, the MV Tuart. More great stuff all over the place and I was in nudibranch heaven with many species I had not seen before. Sunk by Bob Halstead in 1986 it is now covered in growth and home to many creatures. Another good dive.

Next day the conditions were such that I doubt a Sydney dive charter boat or club boat would even leave the wharf, but once again we were thrown all over the ocean as we headed out. This time I was accompanied by four young South Korean women divers who were living in Port Moresby for three months doing some consulting work. Only one of them made it into the water while the other three sat (lay) on the boat wishing they could die. We dived The End Bommie again, and saw the same Rhinopias, even though two were now hiding under a big staghorn coral. Normally on a dive holiday you want to dive different sites each time, but there was plenty to see here, and it was a bit protected from the swell breaking on the reef.

The second dive was Suzie's Bommie and once again there was nice coral on the reef top and excellent growth on the walls. When we returned to the wharf the South Korean girls needed no encouragement to get off the boat.

Next day there were two local businessmen diving with me and they had specific requests where they wanted to go. First stop was Dinah's Delight and it was pretty damn spectacular, with narrow gutters between the bommies, and these were filled with large gorgonians and soft coral trees. I could do this dive over and over and still not see it all as there was a fair bit to cover and a strong current at this depth made for hard work. The guide tried to cover all the bommies in one dive, and I don't know what brand of computer he was using, but my Uwatec was rapidly counting remaining bottom time down to zero, so I just let him go and worked my way up the wall to a shallower depth. Underwater viz of about 40 metres made it easy to locate the boat mooring. A great dive site.



The next site was The Big Drop. The name says it all as this sheer wall covered with nice fans drops off into the abyss. After drifting around on the wall, the reef top was a great way to end the dive searching for little stuff. After lunch back at the resort I elected to do an afternoon dive and requested a muck site as I was the only diver again. We went to Lion Island, which is next to Loloata, and anchored in water so shallow that I couldn't even do a giant stride or backward roll off the boat. Conditions were perfect though and it wasn't long before the guide and I were finding great stuff to photograph. I saw several different types of pipefish, tiny crabs, shrimps, sea



stars, anemones and fish. Of all things weird, there was a wheelbarrow in about 13m, and it was home to some great stuff, and the only reason we came up was so that I wouldn't miss dinner.

One night a large group of tourists (Chinese, I think) came from town and the resort put on a cultural dance display and sing-sing with about twenty dancers, before posing for photos in their native dress. The male tourists were up taking lots of photos of the young bare-breasted girls, while their wives yelled at them. All good fun.

The diving continued until my last day when I just sat around watching my gear dry before packing for a 4am departure for the airport to fly to Hoskins on New Britain. My flight had been brought forward by three hours because they were repairing the airstrip at Hoskins, and could only use small planes to land there.

Loloata has been a dive resort for a long time, and as long as you remember that you are in PNG, and have no pre-conceived ideas of what to expect in a resort, you will enjoy yourself. The prices were reasonable, food was good and the staff friendly. Standard cost is for two dives a day, but you can request an afternoon dive and a night dive if you wish. It would be a reasonably priced destination for a club group holiday.

Ian Hittmann



A REMINDER TO LOOK OUT FOR YOUR EARS!

I'm likely one of the club's less experienced divers, but have around 130 dives and a Master SCUBA Diver certificate, yet, throughout the past four years' diving, and nine certifications, in which I learnt extensively about DCI, DCS, Oxygen Toxicity, Nitrogen Narcosis, etc, etc I have never had it stressed to me how very, very easy it is to sustain a serious ear injury whilst diving.

On Good Friday this year, I did two 18m dives at Blue Fish Point. On one of which I somehow managed to sustain an Inner-Ear Barotruma, which has resulted in hearing loss and unbearable tinnitus and I've also been advised there's a "reasonable likelihood" I will never be able to dive again.

Needless to say, I am devastated by this development, and would dearly love my misfortune to help serve as a warning/heed to other divers, to always be super careful of one's ears!!!

Thanks, and all the best.

Jonathan Leeming



SOUTH WEST ROCKS

Day one

On a cold, overcast morning, We boarded the boat for Fish Rock. We left the river with conditions flat with a light westerly wind behind us, but conditions soon changed once we headed round Trial Bay and headed south to Hat Head. Swell picked up to 1.8m from the south, which resulted in a wet and bumpy ride out to Fish Rock. By the time we hit the Rock, everybody on board the boat thought they'd already done a dive because we were so wet. But soon things changed as we geared up and rolled off the boat to warm 22 degree water. As we floated waiting for others to enter the water, we looked down and were amazed at the visibility – it was so blue and clear. We were looking past 20m! We knew before we even descended that the dive was going to be fantastic once we got below the waves.

Once down there the gutters were full of sharks, unlike on some days when you see hardly any. We followed the gutter wall, dropped over the edge to the bottom, about 28m down. It was a photographer's dream, like George St on a weekday morning, bumper to bumper sharks. Camera flashes were going berserk, like lightning under the water. I think I took some of the best photos of sharks that I have taken with the camera I have. Many of them have scars around their mouths, some have hooks still in their mouths and you just want to help them but of course, you can't. There is even one with rope embedded in its tail. People wonder why they're protected?





After the dive we surfaced to find whales breaching 80m from the boat, a spectacular sight. For the second dive we did the tunnel, which is full of crays, wobbegongs, bulls eyes and cod. After leaving we came into the Aquarium where it was teeming with small fish life, eels and more wobbegongs.



Day two

The swell dropped to 1.7m but the SW wind was stronger than the day before. On the way out to the Rock, we encountered whales breaching again. This time we went through the tunnel first, and as we entered a wobbegong swam out to meet us, eye level and posing for photos. However, nobody paid attention! The entry to the tunnel was choked by a wall of bullseyes. Inside, more wobbegongs again but not so many crayfish, only shells. Again, cod, bulleseyes, a small blue and gold fish we didn't know. On exiting the tunnel we were lucky to get good video footage of two baby eels playing together and excited by our presence, coming right up to the camera lens and performing for our pleasure. We soon reached the Aquarium where it was full of fish life, two kinds of clown fish in the anemones and more eels, then we found a turtle hiding in the rocks. He had better thoughts once we disturbed him and decided to swim away. I took a couple of great shots. Soon after that we surfaced, to find more whales breaching this time only 50m from the boat. What a day!

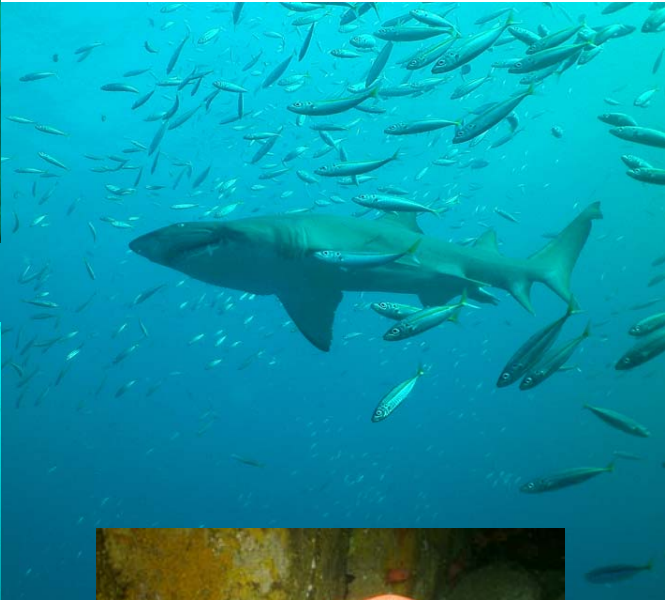
The second dive was again in the shark gutters, but the visibility started to drop with the incoming tide. We spotted a shovel nosed shark, a school of bat rays (around 60), a lion fish and two ghost pipe fish. We also saw a baby manta ray.

By this time we figured we had had a pretty good set of dives and we recommend South West Rocks Dive shop. Good guys, nice family and good boats. This was our third weekend with them and we'll be back soon – even though we don't think the chance of blue water and warm water combined is very likely, especially at this time of year.

Happy diving, John and Tim.

John Crawford and Tim Kennedy







SEA BRAGGIN'

WHAT'S COMING UP?

| WHEN | WHAT/ WHERE | CONTACT | WHEN | WHAT/ WHERE | CONTACT |
|-------------|--|--|-------------------------|-----------------------------------|---|
| Sat 5 July | Deep Dive SS Undola | Peter Flockart pjflockart@speednet.com.au | Fri 11 - Sun 13 July | SWR Weekend away | Ray Moulang rayscases2@gmail.com |
| Sat 12 July | Boat Dive Bypass Reef | Ron Walsh rondwalsh@gmail.com | Sun 13 July | Shore Dive Shiprock | Eddie Ivers eddieivers@iprimus.com.au |
| Wed 16 July | Club Meeting Rowers on Cook Club | Gary Perkins perkinsdive@gmail.com | Sat 19 July | Dbl Boat Dive Long Reef | Caroline Corcoran carolinecorcoran@yahoo.com |
| Sun 20 July | Boat Dive Whale Watch Platform | Shelley Brueseker shellsb@bigpond.net.au | Sat 26 July | Xmas in July Club Heathcote | Les Caterson lescat2@bigpond.net.au |

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