



SEA BRAGGIN'

St George Scuba Club Newsletter

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JAPAN'S ATLANTIS

At the end of January, I joined Ron Hunter (Dive Forster at Fisherman's Wharf) on his Yonaguni, Japan scuba trip in search of big schools of hammerhead sharks and the infamous “underwater monument”. The monument is thought to possibly be the fabled city of Atlantis, as geologists have dated the structure to have been above water during the caveman period and they do not think ancient cavemen would have the ability to create such a thing. Theories are that it is either a natural formation cut out by the wave action on the island, or it was made by a civilization that has been lost to the historical timeline (a missing link in the human evolutionary chain). For a brief video about the monument see <http://www.history.com/shows/ancient-aliens/videos/japans-atlantis> (the end of the video however is a bit American sci-fi-ish).

A lot of people thought I was barking mad when I said I was going diving in Japan during winter; however Yonaguni is a tropical paradise with warm water – the average water temperature while we were there was around 24 degrees. The thing that made the diving really enjoyable was the outstanding visibility - 50m+! We could still see the surface very clearly at 42m! The amazing viz made it much easier to spot the hammerheads, and we saw heaps! Huge schools of more than 100 hammerhead sharks were regularly seen during the deep blue drift dives in open ocean. The unfortunate downside was that they didn't like to stay long or get too close to you so you really had to fin hard against strong current if you wanted a chance to photograph them. Still, it was an amazing experience. I will never forget the absolute awe I was in when I saw one of the big hammerheads for the first time - a huge



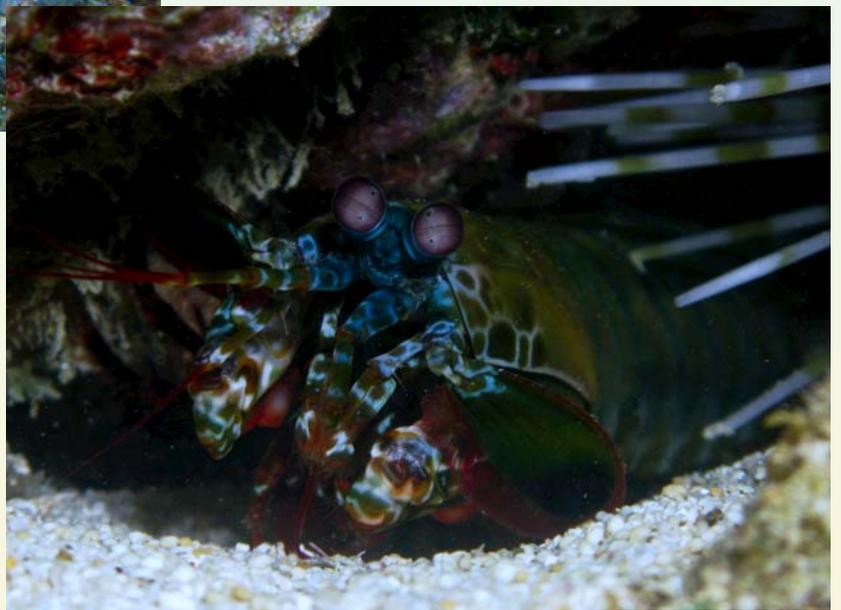


shadow appearing out of the blue and disappearing again once it realised we weren't an easy meal (too much rubber wetsuit is bad for its teeth).

In regards to the underwater monument, it was mystifying as it is made up of almost completely flat, smooth and bare (no coral growth) rock formations. To me it resembled closely the structures made by the Aztec people. What was really strange to me was the 90 degree angles the rock was cut at, all around the site. The apparent step-like structures were indeed very strange and I ultimately don't think erosion or wave action could have been so perfect in so many cases in such a small area. Rock structures such as "the turtle" were pointed out to us and straight away I could see the resemblance. In my mind there is no doubt that some kind of civilisation had a part in the construction of this site.

Ultimately the diving was spectacular and was subsequently followed by a land-based tour of Kyoto and Hiroshima, plus a week of skiing in Nozawa-onsen in Nagano (4m of powder snow was beaut)! Had a fantastic time with amazing people and plenty of Japanese sake, shochu and karaoke (make sure to hear Ron-san's rendition of Hotel California when you are next in Forster)!

Marcus Campbell





SHIPROCK

25 January 2014

With the boat diving cancelled due to forecast bad weather, 13 desperate divers including a couple of new faces descended on Shiprock for a low tide shore dive.

The water was very warm. My computer recorded 24c in the shallows and 23c at the bottom of the wall. The vis was 4 to 5 metres better than the week before when I dived it on the high tide.

I was particularly keen to see the yellow painted angler fish everyone had been photographing over recent weeks. Michael took me straight to it at the start of dive. It is by far the largest painted angler fish I have seen in Sydney, at 4 – 5cm long. I have only seen tiny ones before and it was my assumption that the water was too cold for them to survive long enough to grow.

There were a number of numb rays swimming around and sneaking up on you when you were taking photos. There were also a number of estuary catfish out on the sand as well. I also found 6 or so pineapple fish in a cave. For some reason I've never been to get a good photo of them and today was no different.

Just as we were about to turn around we came across Michael and Kelly looking at something in the rubble. It turned out to be a blue ringed octopus. Very nice.

Just as I was about to surface at the end I came across a little yellow juvenile striped anglerfish in the shallows on the sand.



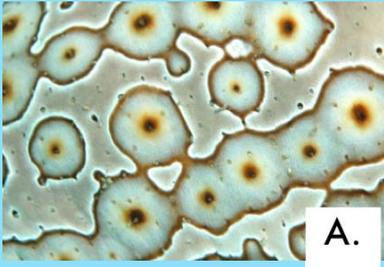
Jason Coombs





SEA BRAGGIN' QUIZ

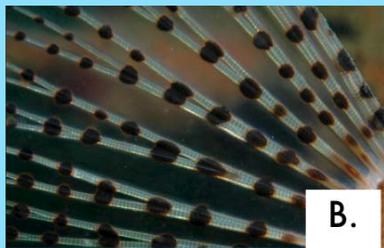
Can you identify the following critters?



A.



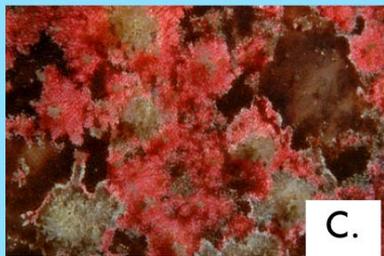
F.



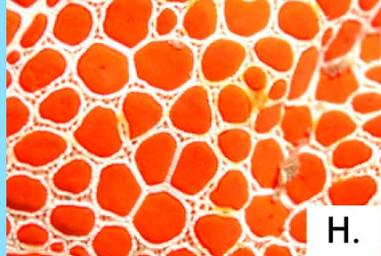
B.



G.



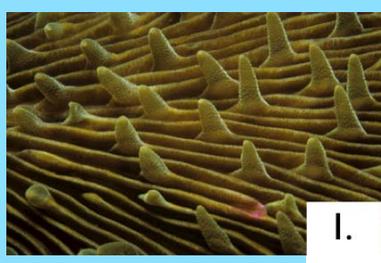
C.



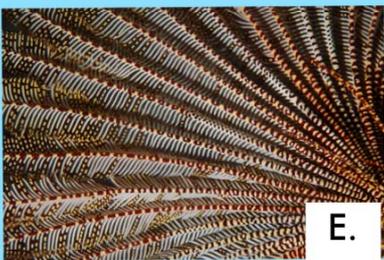
H.



D.



I.



E.



J.

Answers on page 19.



DIVING NZ

We left Auckland at 5:15am for the two and a half hour drive up to Tutukaka for a couple of days diving out at the Poor Knights Islands. Being a lone car on a motorway heading from darkness into the pale morning light and drizzle was doing nothing for my hopes of experiencing this magical place in sparkling sunshine. In fact, upon arriving at Dive! Tutukaka we emerged into the carpark to driving rain and the news that tomorrow's diving had been cancelled, swell height was predicted to be too high due to the tail end of a tropical depression heading our way. We were a little disappointed at the news but today's dive was on and we were going to get wet anyway weren't we! As always, this operator is slick and efficiently organised, and in no time at all we were on board Calypso and heading into the mounting swell. Excellent service and thorough briefings preceded our arrival at the islands (about a 1 hour journey). On the lee side of this landmass that looks a little like Jurassic park we anchored into crystal clear, millpond flat water. Having dived here last year around the same time I knew what to expect, but Aura's utterances of amazement before we descended were enough to remind me how awesome this place is. The water was cool and gin clear mostly. Spectacular kelp forests covering rocky boulders and crevices provide endless opportunities to look for the many critters inhabiting all the nooks and crannies. Speckled and Green Moray eels hide in holes in the rocks, while eagle rays cautiously cruise the sand flats amongst the boulders. We were told their population was decimated a week before by a visiting pod of Orca.

After the \$10 optional lunch (big



ham sandwich, chocolate chip cookie and banana) it was back into the water for a dive on Middle Arch. This spectacular sight was just wonderful, even in the gloomy light of the overcast skies above. Kingfish and huge Snapper accompanied parts of the dive with the ubiquitous Rock Cod and Nudis at rock level providing never ending appearances in the beam of the torch. Through the far side of the arch we dropped through boulder swim-throughs before levelling off as the kelp forest underneath us continued dropping off into the blue gloom. It is a majestic and beautiful dive site.

The trip back was punctuated by a succession of



seasick punters trying to cope with the roll of the swell. We both felt great and despite the weather had enjoyed a wonderful day. My trip here last year alone was better weather-wise, but the viz was excellent and the location is just stunning, anyone who has the time and inclination to do so should get out there, if even for a day. It's a big day from Auckland, but our accommodation at the Tutukaka holiday park was fantastic. Stay there and do two or three days! Michael has a great informative section on his website, so I will avoid adding more detail here...

A few days later I found myself convincing Aura that we should bring the dive gear with us on our tour of the South Island "just in case...", and we departed on a flight to Queenstown to see the South.

Upon reaching town I casually stopped off at one of the many tourist activity booking agents and

Routeburn Valley and other wonders of the South in the sunshine made for good time-wasting.

Finally Wednesday dawned and we headed off in a rental car to Milford at 6:30am. We had to arrive to meet the boat in Milford at 10. This was a challenge in hindsight, give yourself a good four hours if you ever decide to try this. We only just made it in time! For any who have not been, even if you don't want to brave the cold water and dive, this is one of the most spectacular places on Earth. Driving through the Darren Mountains as you wind up the Hollyford Valley to the Homer tunnel will take your breath away, utterly spectacular.

We met Lance and Simone (our hosts) at the commercial boat ramp away from the throngs of tourists. The boat was not large, but perfectly suitable for carrying the nine people we had on board that day.

Two things that should be noted about Milford Sound: the sand-flies are voracious predators and could probably eat you alive if you walked around naked for too long... my dry-suit undergarment was a life saver. The second thing is the water temperature. I was expecting about 15 or 16, it didn't really worry me because I was diving dry, but when I casually asked Lance before heading out, his answer was more devastating for Aura, who was not diving dry... "Uhhhm... about 11 or 12 degrees unfortunately." This was not what she wanted to hear, my sales pitch of, "it'll be a once in a lifetime experience honey" wasn't working anymore.

The serenity of the Sound and the majestic mountains rising almost vertically out of the water however provided a good distraction from this news



enquired as to whether diving Milford Sound was a possibility, 20 minutes later we had booked and paid for a self-drive dive trip to Milford two days hence. I'll spare you the other activities, but wineries, the



and the promise of extra neoprene was welcomed enthusiastically. A short 20minute run towards the ocean saw us stop in Penguin bay getting ready for the first dive. By way of

introduction, Milford Sound is a unique environment for diving due to its location in the wettest inhabited part of our planet, about 6800mm per year! The incredible rainfall funnelling of the mountains into the sound (technically a fjord), causes a layer of fresh water between half a meter and five or six meters deep to overlie the salty sea water below. The tannin



stained water above allows for the growth and existence of an ecosystem more commonly found at much greater depths, particularly the very stunning black coral trees (which are actually white). The shallows of the bay were a nice place to start. I could see the shock as Aura's breath was taken away on entry. But once under the water, the fascinating vista leaves all other thoughts, including those of the cold I suppose to move to the back of your mind. The goal was to get 'comfortable' in the shallows and then follow the wall around to the next bay. Descending through the layer where the two waters mix can be a little disorientating as they mix with two different refractive indices, much like water and oil. Once through this layer, and once your eyes adjust to the gloom, a new world opens up below. Steep dark walls, with old tree limbs preserved in the silt; huge crayfish hiding in every nook and cranny and strange cold water fish mainly Rock Cod like. The coral trees are incredible; some are huge, clinging tenaciously to the

dark walls like glowing white living chandeliers. The larger of them are estimated to be many hundreds of years old. It is a surreal place. The viz on this dive was

between 15 and 20 metres. Getting out of the water, it took a while for Aura to warm up again, but with a long-sleeve hooded sharkskin, 7mm suit, 5mm vest and another hood she had fared pretty well. While we had our surface interval, Lance took a courageous Norwegian for a discover scuba intro dive. My hat was off to this gentleman...a solid effort which he

seemed to absolutely love.

Next off we headed out towards the entrance to the Sound, and got in for a drift along a wall on the incoming tide. Five metres out from the wall and the depth sounder on the boat said 85 metres! Obviously keeping track of your position on the wall was important. Driving back over the Homer pass at the end of the day meant a depth limit of no more than 25m was sensible. Incredible! We were both so happy with this dive. Bright yellow zoophytes covering the walls, hundreds of crayfish...some just enormous, and of course more white coral. The majority of the Sound is a marine park...so many things can grow big! The viz this time was about 25-30m!

The trip back to the ramp was punctuated by stops to see seals, penguins, dolphins and to park the nose of the boat under the 155m high Sterling falls. It was an amazing day.

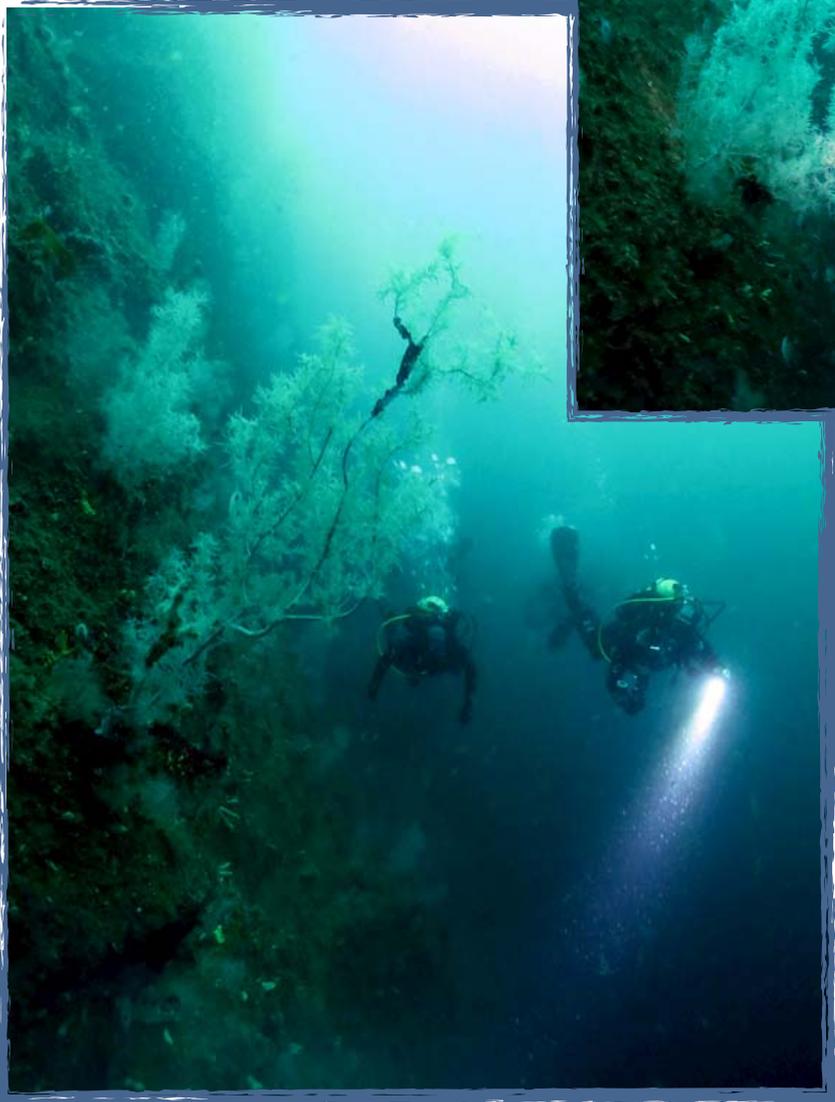
A few notes. We took the self-drive option and had all our own equipment barring tanks and weights. This



was NZ\$249 each, quite reasonable I thought, but it meant putting in about seven and a half hours of driving all up, this isn't for everyone, but it did mean we could stop and marvel at the surrounds when we wanted to. If you stay in Te Anau and hire gear, it's \$349, they take care of transfers, self-driving from here to Milford is \$299. Full gear-hire and return to Queenstown is \$399 per person. The hire gear is serious; DIR style harness and back plates, good regs and Jetstream fins for everyone as well as ample 7mm neoprene and hoods. I was impressed with the gear and the service. The only two drawbacks

were the toilet facilities on the boat, but Lance hopes to upgrade soon, and of course the pesky sand-flies... but ultimately a small price to pay for such a unique day out.

Josiah Firth





SEA BRAGGIN'

PUERTO GALERA, PHILIPPINES

Christmas 2013

Over Christmas and New Year Rox and I spent two weeks in Puerto Galera Philippines, 3 hours drive and a ferry south of Manilla. We stayed and dived with El Galleon / Asia Divers who have their own jetty so you step straight onto the boat.

The dive shop had 50 dive sites shown on the map on the wall. Almost all were less than 15 minutes boat ride from the jetty, some were only 30 seconds. In spite of this we dived a number of sites that weren't on the map! In all there must be 60 – 70 dive sites in the local area.

The dive sites ranged from walls and rich coral reefs to sandy muck diving sites. In the latter category at two sites, The Boatyard and Clam Gardens, we saw flamboyant cuttlefish, mimic octopus, painted anglerfish, spiny seahorses, tozuma shrimp, different nudibranchs and other creatures I'm yet to identify. The night diving here was especially good.

Due to shark finning we only saw one shark. It just happened to be a thresher shark! There is a local area that the sharks return



to every December. There were two in the area that were seen regularly by groups diving these sites over a number of days.

We didn't see large schools of pelagics on the local reefs but on the day we went out to Verde Island (30 minute trip away) there were barracuda, silver trevally, sweetlips etc. There was a huge diversity of fish life on the coral reef dives and we saw sea moths a number of times, different types of snake eels, velvet fish, cockatoo wasp fish, giant angler fish, jaw fish, peacock gurnard and sea snakes. One highlight was an elongated juvenile shaded batfish hiding in a cave.





The water temperature can get down to 22 – 23c at this time of year but we were lucky to have 27 – 28c during our whole stay. Over 11 diving days (we had a rest day in the middle) we did 48 dives. They wouldn't let us do a night dive on Christmas Day, New Years Eve or New Years Day – I have no idea why.

We were very well looked after by El Galleon with our dive requests, and the set up and nitrox made it easy to do 4 or 5 dive 60 minute plus dives a day. Our accommodation and the food were also very good and the Filipino staff were all friendly and hospitable.

With the number of sites and diversity of life you could easily spend a month or two here and still see new things. While it is not as famous as nearby Anilao for muck diving it certainly had many of the critters people travel a long way to see.

Jason Coombs





THE TIDE WILL TURN!

Ladies weekend, Nelson Bay

28 February - 2 March 2014

Nancy Scoleri, Kelly McFadyen, Sarah Lockley, Shelley Breuseker, Kim Dinh, Maxine Hayden, Shalene Ridley, Catherine and Anne Anderson

Not having been on a weekend away with the club nor having dived at Nelson Bay previously, I was looking forward to an interesting few days.

The weekend started in somewhat dubious weather conditions, with rain and dark clouds as the good Doc Lock and I headed up the freeway. It was further compounded by a flat tyre thrown in for good measure!

Undaunted we arrived and easily found the accommodation at the 'retreat'... although my GPS had it initially located in a dump, it was far from that! Cosy little cabins with a good kitchen and comfy layout. There was plenty of outdoor space for use when it isn't raining (next time!)

Shalene had located an awesome place for dinner at the golf course which had great service and price and thankfully included a glass of wine.

Next morning we headed to Fly Point in the rain, which was pretty heavy. I was not sure it looked all that inviting to be honest, but once there the conditions looked pretty calm and you could see good viz from above in the car park area. Anyway, we got this far right?

It was a great dive. Viz about 10m at best, and with an incoming tide we were swept along fairly quickly.



One of the first things I saw was a Sea Hare (not sure I've seen one before), followed by more nudibranchs per square metre than I have ever seen. They must be pretty happy there as they are also some of the biggest ones I have ever seen!

As a newbie to the site, I was initially a little concerned about the speed of the drift, but Maxine took to the slate reassuring us that the tide would turn, and as if by magic it did almost as soon as she





finished writing it! Temp was good at about 21 degrees, but in the wetsuit, I was cold by the end of the hour dive.

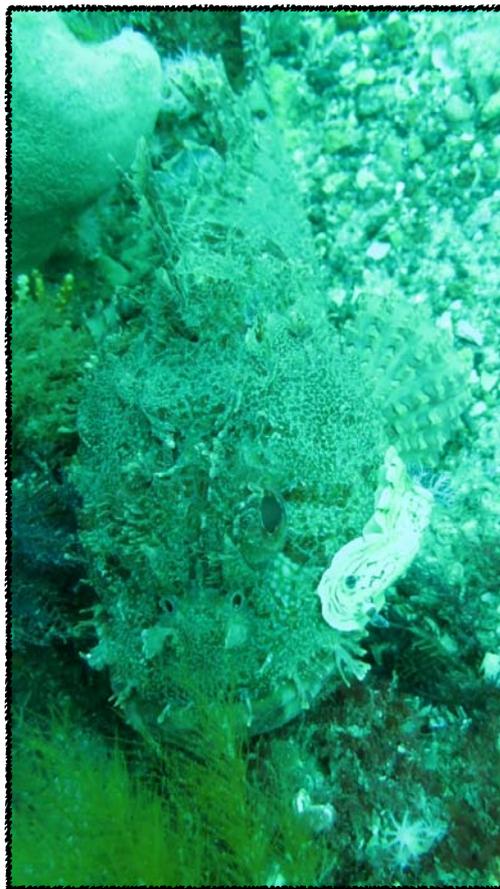
A great dive done and then off for CACA! And most importantly, some mandatory girl shopping time!! Nelson bay has quite a few cool little shops and cafes. It is certainly a great place to wander around and possibly spend a few cents along the way :)

A BBQ on Saturday evening was had, with some good conversations and plenty of food and just a couple of vinos. Thanks to the club for subsidising that one, the shoppers who got all the food sorted and the makers of the dinner. I gladly took to the BBQ-ing!



Next morning, faced with more rain, we decided to head back to Fly Point as it had been so good the day prior. The tide was an hour later, so a Sunday sleep in was welcome!

Dive 2 was even better than dive one. No sea hares this time that I saw, but more nudis, including, so I am led to believe, a black, yellow and white one which apparently is rare to see and has the much easier name of Polycera capensis. I did also manage to see a nudi hitching a ride on a rock cod, which was



kinda out there but interesting! We also saw wobbies, flat heads and shrimps, while others saw eels, octopuses and rays. It was all good and a bit warmer than the day before. This was followed by CABA (coffee and burgers afterwards)!

Then we were off home and ready for more next year!!

A huge thanks to Nancy for organising the weekend, and to the club for subsidising the weekend's BBQ. A truly great way to get to know other members better, dive some new sites and

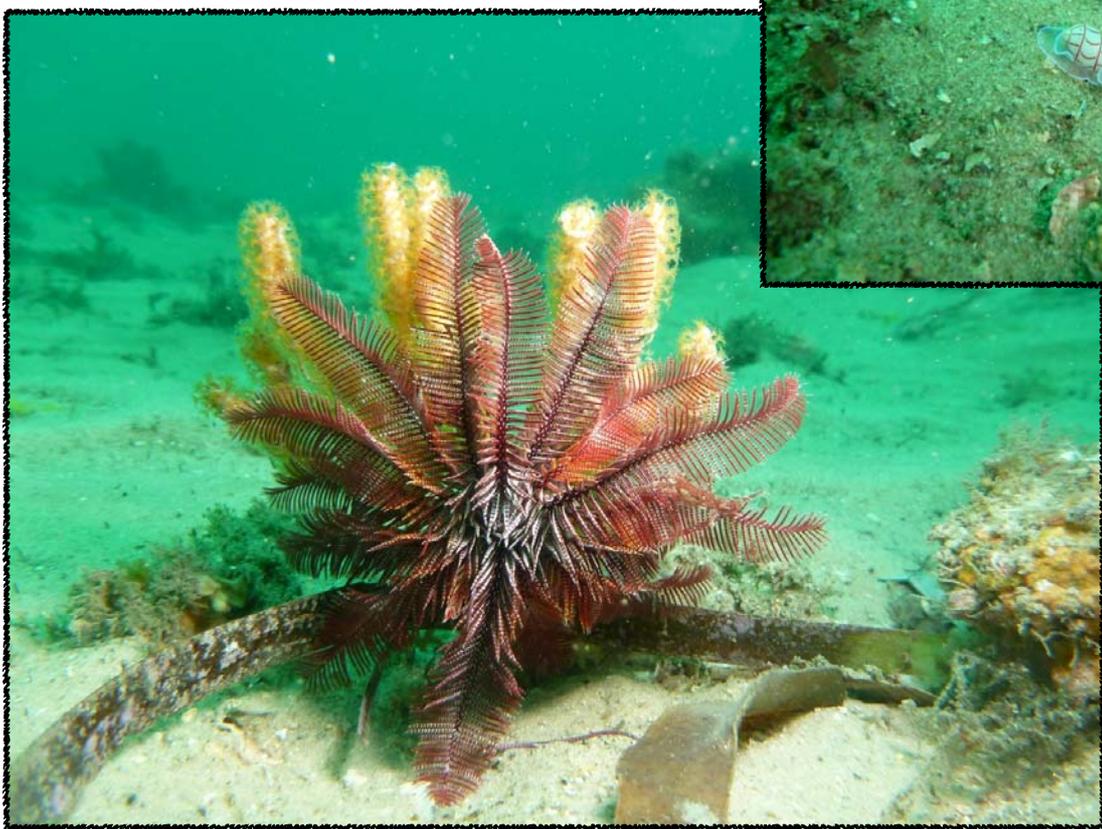
see some new marine life (for some of us anyhow!)

Janine Gregson

Photos by Nancy Scoleri and Janine Gregson



SEA BRAGGIN'





SEA BRAGGIN'

LEMBEH, SULAWESI, INDONESIA

On 7 January I went to Indonesia to dive at Lembeh Straights. To get there, you fly to Singapore, stay overnight and then fly to Manado. The Manado leg is about 3.5 hours. Then it is two hours in a mini bus to Lembeh Hills, also known as Dabirah. This is a luxury resort just out of Bitung, the main city. Dabirah means 'closest to nature'. The resort has magnificent views down the Straights, sunbirds in the garden and Sea Eagles soaring in front every day.

I began by doing four dives a day, but after four days exhaustion set in. I wimped out and decided to do a double dive in the morning followed by a night dive.

There are about 70 recognised dive sites in Lembeh Straights. About one third of it is coral reefs. The rest is black volcanic sand. The sand is up to one metre deep. All sorts of living things live on and under the sand. Lembeh Straights is a bit like Noah's Ark. Lots of animals concentrated in a small place. It is world famous because of the incredible photo opportunities.

I rate dives according to how many photos I take. Forty photos means a pretty good dive. I regularly took 100 photo dives. There were many times when I had three or four fantastic photo subjects at the same time. As I cannot make decisions, I photographed them all.

The highlight for me was the night diving. I managed to do 14 night dives. We found huge Bobbit

Worms, lots of Demon Stingers, Ambon Scorpionfish, Frogfish and Snake Eels. We found a large Harp Shell, crawling across the sand one night. There is a Mandarin Fish dive. These Mandarin Fish are twice the size of the ones in Palau.



You have to have a guide over here. The going rate is about \$10 a day as a tip. They are fantastic and will find you whatever you want. It is a bit like a restaurant and a menu. My dive guide was John. I would say, John can we photograph a Rhinopias? He would plan the next dive so that you have a Rhinopias. This does not always work. The Rhinopias Scorpionfish were hiding for the first week. We did not find one until day eleven.

The dive guides will do whatever you ask them. John, can we feed a Bobbit Worm? No worries. We





plan the dive for the spot where Bobbit Worms are most likely to be seen. He organised the dinner.



Wonderpus occies are very common. They are quite small and try to crawl down holes when annoyed. Lembeh is a nudibranch lovers' paradise. There are many different types that are easy to find. January is not prime time weather wise. However, Lembeh is protected and you can dive here all year round. The really big PLUS of this trip is that everything was breeding. Every crab and every Mantis Shrimp was carrying eggs.

You need ten days in Lembeh to get to see 30 odd dive sites. Otherwise, you will miss out on some of the best stuff. This means you need two weeks Sydney to Sydney.

I am seriously thinking about a return trip to Lembeh. If you want to dive one of the critter hot spots of the world, and you are interested, let me know. I am thinking late October 2014 or maybe 2015. If there is enough interest, I will get some serious figures organised. I expect it will cost about \$3800. Once again, please contact me. Call 0415158168 or email mikescotland@bigpond.com.

There are 40 photos on my website, click on the Lembeh tab on the home page. www.mikescotlandscuba.com

Mike Scotland



MAGIC POINT AND HENRYS HEAD

15 February 2014

Divers: John Beddie, Sheila Baldock, Maxine Hayden, Mike Scotland and Paul Pacey

This dive trip was a boat dive organised by John Beddie leaving Port Botany on Seajohn.



As we left the shelter of the bay the NE swell was rolling about 1 metre with a light NE wind behind it.

We first attempted to dive on Bypass reef but “Yes Dear II” and Le Scat were taking up all the prime anchor spots. So we decided to motor north and dive with the sharks at Magic Point. The theory being that, since a southerly wind change was forecast about midday, we would be better to do a northern dive first and come back to Bypass reef later.

Conditions were good at the sharks considering that the site was directly exposed to both the swell and the wind which was still light. We must have been

early as we were the first boat there.

We hit the (cold) water and headed for the sharks, which was quite a pleasant swim with visibility about 15 metres. There were 5 or 6 sharks cruising menacingly up and down the wall, with schooling Yellow Tail and Sweep cluttering the view. I bet the fishies aren't game to cruise around here so calmly at night!

After about 20 minutes of shark appreciation and getting colder we decided to get some exercise and headed east along the wall towards Magic Point itself. This was a cruisey swim and there are some interesting gutters and overhangs to investigate along the way. We found an Eastern Blue Devilfish and many Wobby's snoozing the way they normally do (why don't they get cold?).

When we surfaced we couldn't help notice that Rent-a-crowd had arrived, with 4 other boats with their divers in the water.

After a pleasant surface interval in Long Bay we motored back towards Botany Bay and changed our mind about diving Bypass Reef and instead headed to Henry Head for a drift dive. This may have seemed like a dumb idea as the tide was now running out (read dirty water) and indeed the current was quite strong when we jumped





in and the water was dirty. However when we dropped to the bottom and headed towards the sand line at 20 metres depth the current dropped to naff all and the viz opened up to better than 10 metres. I've dived around Henry Head years ago and remember it as a good dive site but I have to say that, where we went this day, it was a spectacular dive site. The only issue was John was expecting us to drift east with the current and we saw that the best part of the beautiful reef was actually to the west of the head. Since there was no current going west it was easy to do so off we went – hoping that John would just follow the bubbles.

The reef is very pretty with large sponge gardens, crevices and narrow sandy gutters and you swim past huge bommies maybe 5 metres high and these are covered in small gorgonians and sponges too. The habitat looks ideal for seahorses and angler fishes but I was unable to find any even though I enjoyed the effort – they are definitely there though. Mike found a large Red Indian fish and he and Maxine proceeded to strobe it into submission. The problem with the reef being so deep is that were soon into deco so we headed slowly up into the shallower water on the western side of Henry Head. We deployed a safety sausage during our safety stop but, when we surfaced, uh, oh, no SeaJohn! What is that saying “Plan your dive, Dive...”? Oh, never mind, I just swam a few metres out so I could see around the point and waved

the sausage at John who was waiting just around the corner.

Peter Beaumont was also diving from his boat at Henry Head and we had to agree with him that the sponge gardens at Henry Head are much better than those between the Steps and The Leap on the south side of the bay. BUT, you need a boat to get to Henry Head, so we're not comparing like for like. Still, we'll definitely be back at Henry Head when the tide and conditions are right.

Thanks to Captain John Beddie for taking us out on his boat and to Mike for the attached photos.

Paul Pacey

ANSWERS TO QUIZ

- A Sea cucumber skin pattern
- B Lionfish fin
- C Frogfish skin
- D Pufferfish fin
- E Featherstar

- F Toxic Sea Urchin spines
- G Flying Gurnard fish
- H Sea Star
- I Mushroom coral
- J Broomtail wrasse

Carole Harris



WHAT'S COMING UP?

WHEN	WHAT/ WHERE	CONTACT	WHEN	WHAT/ WHERE	CONTACT
Wed 19 Mar	Club Meeting Rowers on Cook	Jason Coombs j.coombs@unsw.edu.au	Sat 22 - Sun 23 Mar	Camping and Bushwalking weekend	Michael McFadyen michael@michaelfadyenscuba.info
Sat 29 Mar	Shore Dive Bare Island	Gary Perkins perkinsdive@gmail.com	Sun 30 Mar	Frenchmans Bay Dive and BBQ	Eda Di Camillo edadicamillo@bigpond.com
Sat 5 April	Boat Dive Pizza Reef	Tricia Henry thenry456@bigpond.com	Sun 6 April	Shore Dive & BBQ The Leap	Paul Pacey paul.pacey@iinet.net.au
Sat 12 April	Boat Dive Wedding Cake Island	Bill Rowland bill@Rowland88.com	Sun 13 April	Shore Dive & BBQ Bass Point	Ron Walsh rondwalsh@gmail.com

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