



Sea Braggin'

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

- SEPTEMBER 2009 - Edited by Ray Moulang -

Included in this issue are Dive Reports from Eda Dicamillo, John Prior and Ron Walsh. A big thank you goes to them.

Members please submit reports as you do them not just as the month draws to an end.

2009 President's Report

We had another great year and continue to break records for the club including a record 111 members, a 27 page newsletter in July and 5 overseas trips.

The club has a great history stretching back to 1973 (when I was 2 years old!). Just checking Michael's history of the club from the website 25 years ago in 1984 Phil Rose was Vice-President, Tim Rigg was the Secretary and Geoff Sanders was Treasurer. All are still members today!



According to the history some other members also achieve significant milestones this year; Eddy Labour and Leo Bergagnin achieved 15 years of membership this year and Les and Ellie Catterson have been life members for 10 years. Congratulations! Recent diving milestones for members included Ron Walsh and Shiela Baldock achieving 1,000 dives and our Vice-President Peter Flockart clocked up dive number 2,000. Congratulations!



We achieved a new record of membership at 111 members including long time Sydney diving stalwarts Greg Blackburn and Shelley Bruesker who we welcomed to the club.

While we have had concerns with the club growing too big we now have 6 boats in the club and a number of recent events have seen 5 of them out at any one time with up to 26 divers on board.

A special thank you to the boat owners; Les and Michael McFadyen, Dave, Ian, John, Ray and Michael Wright.

Overseas trips this year include Tasmania, Thailand, Vanuatu, Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea. This compares to only a single overseas trip running 3 years ago.

Special thanks to our committee members:

Peter Flockart as Vice-President selling raffle tickets and also running the meetings in my absence.



Probably the biggest job in the club currently goes to Mark Ridsdale as Treasurer. With his receipt book working overtime to take deposits for all the trips Mark has kept account down to the last cent. Can anyone remember last months balance?



Eddie Ivers our scribe has kept minutes documenting the records for the future of the club.

Dave Casburn has supported Mark and Eddie as the Assistant Treasurer / Secretary.

Ray Moulang has taken the newsletter to new heights with that recent 27 page newsletter.

Michael McFadyen continued to keep our very active website up and running. The statistics on visitors to the site continue to climb and is probably a big driver for our current record membership.



The photo gallery features photos of manta rays, seals and even dolphins taken in Sydney by Ron Walsh.



Special thanks also to Heinz for organising the tank tests and Kelly for organising our insurance. Both are of great service to members.

We do continue to be successful because of the contribution of our members and I realise I will miss some peoples names. I would like to

thank everyone who has organised an event on behalf of the club. We had 146 items on our calendar this year and only 12 were meetings. That's a ratio of more than 12 to 1 and shows you what kind of a club we are.

During the last year it was very distressing to see Janine Jenkins severely injured on the club ski trip. The great news is that Janine is back in the water diving again. The moral is stick to diving with sharks - skiing is just too dangerous!

Remember to keep safe and enjoy your diving.

Treasurer's Report - 12 months ended 30th June 2009 -

2009 continued the previous year's high activity level with more away trips, weekend and mid week diving and socials than any other previous year.

I think the calendar had over 150 club events scheduled – if you missed out – you weren't serious about being a member.

A Thank you to all the Committee members, members of sub-committees and to David Casburn for their and his support of the Treasurer's role.

A big **Well Done** to all the members who organised events this year and for their liaison with me to make sure that all went smoothly with the operators of dive charters and accommodation providers. If that sounds like what I said last year – you are right – it has been hectic but made easier by those willing to give a little or some cases a lot of help.

Club membership reached an all time high at 111 members. It is also pleasing to note that 11 new members have joined the club since the end of June 09.

The Club continues to benefit from a 'fee free' interest bearing cheque account and maintains a term deposit on a 4-month roll for \$5,000.00 in order to earn additional interest. Interest rates are somewhat subdued at the moment but the club still managed \$159.06 in interest income.

Total Income for the year was \$6508.36 and total expenditure was \$5,908.65 resulting in a surplus of income over expenditure of \$599.71 which is detailed on the attached Income and Expenditure Statement.

Of the total expenditure, \$1100.62 was spent on running costs, \$3,147.03 on member benefits (up nearly \$500.00 on the previous year) and \$1,661.00 on stock purchases for the new club fleeces.

The Christmas Party at Kurnell was a run away success (there goes the cheque book) with over \$350.00 more spent this year – the club spent over \$1100.00, which was partly offset by the Christmas raffle (\$967.00).

I am not sure whether the wild life has settled back from the hiss of the Cappuccino machine yet!

Once again, the committee continues its commitment in supporting and encouraging the club's diving and social activities.

The club received \$20,858.50 from club members as deposits for trips and paid out \$20,959.50 to operators during the year.

As at June 09, \$630.00 is held on behalf of members for trip deposits yet to be remitted to operators, \$219.00 is due to be refunded to members and \$150.00 has been paid by the club for future events – overall a net \$699.00 is held on behalf of members.

Club funds for the benefit of members at the end of June 09 was \$9033.69

The club is financially sound and able to meet its commitments as they fall due.

Mark Ridsdale

Treasurer – St George Scuba Club

19th August 2009

-----Scuba Club Happenings-----

Brazilian Night.

On Saturday 1 August – 22 St George members made it to Leichhardt,



Mostly on time and hungry (well they ate like they were very hungry).



The food was excellent and it just kept coming for 2 1/2 hours.

It was a feast. Every sort of imaginable type of skewered meat (even chicken hearts) including some seafood.

The onslaught of the meats was diluted by cheese, fruit, also servings of salad, chips & deep fried banana pieces.

This was all washed down with red or white wine, beer or soft drinks.



By the end of the night we were all rolling on our backs we were so full, except for two people (whose identity I won't reveal but will give them the alias of "DC" and "PT")

Nevertheless, an executive decision was made that, seeing we were in "little Italy", we should take this opportunity to try some gelato.

There were a few stops along the way to perve at the Brazilian samba dancers with their teeny weenie bits of bikini but that didn't last long as ice cream was waiting. Divers certainly have their priorities right.

The owner of the ice cream shop must have thought all his Christmases had come at once when he saw our mob approaching the shop. Peter T, the businessman that he is, decided it was more economical to buy a



whole tub of ice cream rather than two cones.

The owner must have been so overjoyed at this because he started randomly giving away scoops of ice cream.

After desert most of us went to the local pub for further chatting, drinking and some pool playing. I think Elly T. beat all the boys at pool (well she was grinning like she did).



Thank you everyone for coming and making it a great fun night.

Eda Dicamillo

Vanuatu Trip - August 2009

Monday 10 Aug 2009:

After waiting at home for 45 minutes, a cab eventually arrived. I could have walked to the airport by now. I just hoped this would not be prophetic of the whole dive trip.

Arriving at the airport 0945 hrs, I received a call from Paul "Where RU?" I found Paul and Ray standing in a line as the check-in hadn't opened yet. "Sorry, group check in" was the call as I pushed my way past all the irritated passengers waiting to check in for their flight. Calls were made to (the absent)

Dave Burns. Call one and two went un-answered but call three scored. David was still in Sutherland navigating, and, well, I think enough has been said...

With precision that would have made the BMW factory proud we were quickly through the check-in, immigration, security, and seated with coffee and cake. David, like the cavalry in those black and white westerns, arrived "just in the nick

of time". Boarding was less efficient, but this reinforced that we were in reality on our way to Vanuatu and we had best re-adjust our personal clocks to ISLAND TIME. We were in the air by 1310 hrs and climbing through the clouds.

After only three hours of flying we touched down in Port Vila and, a short bus ride later, we arrived at our digs, the Melanesian hotel.

The Melanesian, Port Vila, is a three star hotel located close to Port, just up the hill from the Big Blue Dive Centre and the town centre. We had arrived late and the sun had already set.

Over a beer (Tusker of course) we decided to grab some food, well pizza, and more Tuskers from the pool bar and crash early.

In the morning we were much happier little divers, I doubt much sleep happened though as we were all just a little bit over stimulated, as kiddies away from home do tend to be!



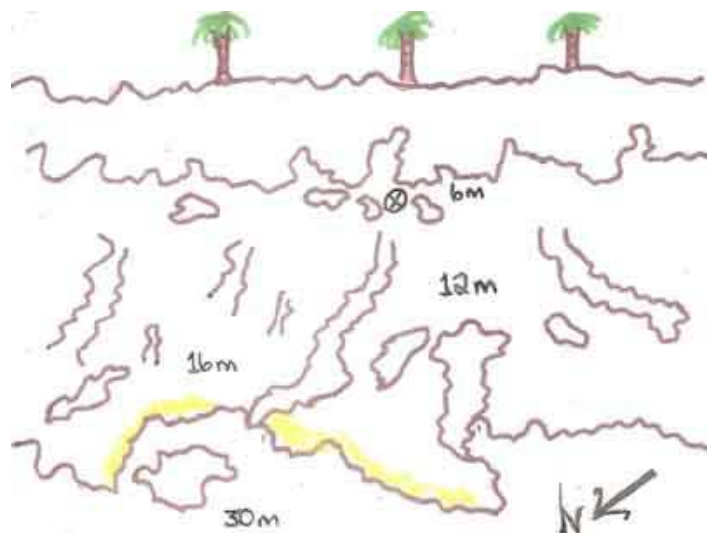
Tuesday 11 Aug 2009:

From 0630 Hrs onwards there were sounds from all around, showers, and sinks percolating. We eventually managed to drag ourselves to the breakfast bar and got stuck into it. Ahhhh, coffee and eggs, coffee and cereal, coffee and juice.

The joys of caffeine.

We were to be picked up at 0800 hrs and delivered to Deep Blue Divers central command. They arrived on time driving a sedan car, looked at Paul then decided a pickup truck would be more appropriate and said they'd be back. I don't really know what the message there was. John, Paul and Ray climbed in the cab with Maggie driving and Sam, another diver, in the passenger seat. "Sorry David you need to sit in the back and guard the gear".

There was the usual indemnity paperwork to be filled in, so that is why you need a C-card.





We were introduced to the skipper and dive masters, Jerry and Roger. Besides us there were a collection of divers including a pair of Japanese divers, one a cigarette smoking Octogenarian with a new camera - more about that later.

We were quickly geared up and underway, motoring around Iririki Island to our first dive site, Bougainvillea reef.

Bougainvillea reef is a flat reef in 12 to 14 metres. It takes its name from the numerous colourful corals and anemones. At the edge of the reef there is a drop off to 30 metres plus. At the drop off we came across beautiful flowering yellow stag-horn coral cascading down to a white sandy bottom. The briefing had told us to expect manta rays - well we didn't see any. There was a slight current so we were going to do the dive as a drift dive, O the luxury!

Entering the water, Ray, David, Paul and John with DM Roger descended and progressed to the wall, from here we drifted SW along the wall.



Paul tells me he found the largest Nudibranch he'd ever seen, yellow with black bracketing. Green and brown anemones with far too many clown fish were everywhere. At one point DM Jerry became very animated and was seen pointing between two large rocks.

The thought flashed through my mind "great, a shark, no, a manta, no, a bull.., no leopard ray.....". Alas, it was a Cuttlefish! Not a particularly large or colourful cuttlefish but definitely a cuttlefish. Gee, needed to come all the way to Vanuatu to find a cuttlefish!

There was a medium sized black moray, with small white spots sitting comfortably in a great coral cave, luckily it was well schooled in modelling and was more than willing to pose for a shot or two, I didn't really notice but a queue had formed behind me, maybe time to move on.



Wednesday 12 August 2009:

First dive of the day, the wreck of the Semle Federesen (and Pango Reef).

The Semle Federesen was an inter-island trader, deliberately scuttled in 1985 for divers. In 1987 cyclone Uma hammered Vila and the Semle Federesen was moved further down the slope to its present position in 30 metres. Luckily there was no current to speak of.

The water was a very clear 20 metres and improving, mind you this would have been better if the sun had been out. The reef descended, below the wreck to 30 metres.

We commenced the dive by descending on a buoy connected to the king post. DM Roger, Dave, Ray Paul and John close behind, penetrated the hull and from there we moved to the engine room.

Exiting the engine room, by ascending through the companion way hatch we were in the bridge, from here we exited the wreck to the starboard side, then descending to the prop at 35 metres. What we hadn't noticed was DM Roger flipping over the rails and re-entering the hull. Afterwards he wondered where we had gone! My excuse was "hey I was photographing some soft corals at the propeller".

Paul commented on the aggression of the anemone fish, possibly Piranha disguised as anemone fish.



From the propeller we set off towards Pango Cove reef and some lovely corals along the way.

Pango Reef is described as a very versatile reef, with sheltered waters suitable for diver training. Big Blue was moored in 5m, with the bottom running gently out to 12m. Perfect for decompressing, safety stop, inexperienced divers, and snorkelers.

At Pango there are white sandy gutters flanked by encrusted reefs covered with colourful coral and fish and supposedly some WWII artefacts, but we didn't see any. The wreck of the Semle Federesen lays to the south of Pango Cove in 30 metres of water.

At Pango the water visibility was over 22 metres and is an expansive reef network; however, regrettably part of the reef had been severely damaged, we

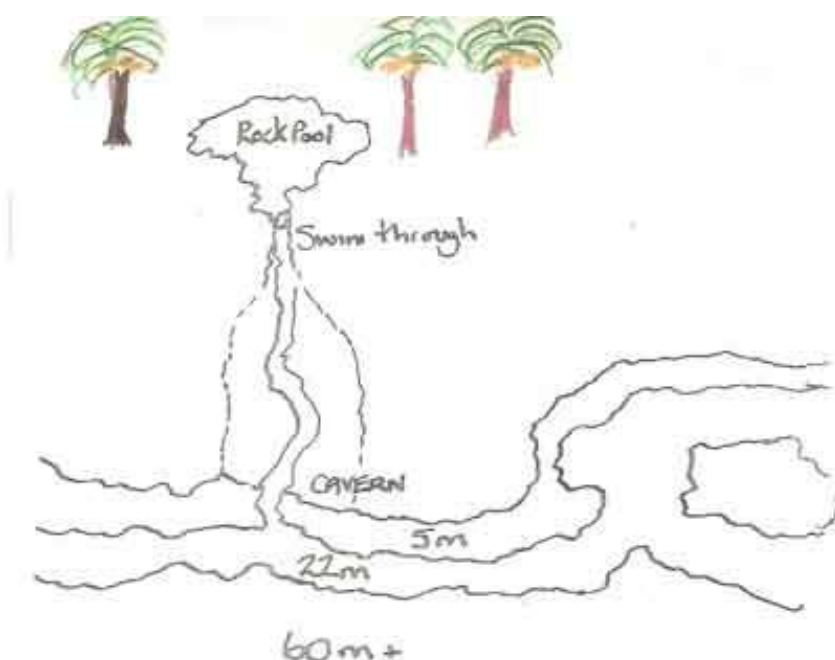


suggest by past dynamiting, gladly this no longer is a practice in this area.

Marine life in the area included beautiful pipe fish, nudibranch, leafy scorpion fish, a small interesting crab that no one knew what to call, small Dough Boy Clams embedded in coral and in the open.

Dive info was 42.5 for 52 minutes, visibility was 22 metres and the temperature was 25.2C.

Second dive of the day was at Cathedral Cave.



Cathedral Cave at Pango Point is a spectacular limestone rock formation, a great underwater cave that opens into the surrounding reef. Due to the overcast conditions we did not get to view the full visual effects of the cave, with shafts of light radiating from the vaulted ceiling, bugger. Evidently it is possible under still conditions to ascend the shafts of light into a blue hole opening deep into the point itself.

Ray could be seen rummaging in the debris on the floor of the cave and Paul was enthralled by little critters on the wall. I do not know what happened to David but he assures me he was there. Exiting the cave we drifted in a northerly direction back towards Villa, exploring the reef at Pango. This is a great wall dive – highly recommended.

Big Blue made the return journey in good time returning us to Vila with plenty of time to wash our gear and have a bite to eat and socialise.

During the last dive I had noticed that the armature on my camera, holding the focusing light in place, had loosened. So a 1/8th Allen key was needed, no there is no Bunnings in Villa, but there is a Wilco, which I take to be Bislama for Bunnings. The Great Villa - Allen Key hunt occupied us for the rest of the afternoon.

After a successful Allen Key hunt, we then began the great Villa Lobster Hunt (nearly time for dinner). Evidently it was not Lobster season in Vila so our attention was



directed on doing something to assist with the endangered listing of the coconut crab. They are no longer endangered on Efate, they are now extinct. Proudly I am able to say that I had nothing to do with this environmental vandalism - but that is another story, better left to others (refer to the Vanuatu trip gastronomy report - a separate publication).

In conclusion Paul highly recommends the Tusker beer, he states it is very fine beverage and goes well with all endangered species.

The next day was mostly spent swanning around the town (it was raining) until our flight from Vila to Santo on a small plane which was pretty much empty.

We have to say that our diving experience with Big Blue Diving was excellent. Mike and Maggie run a great operations and their crew are friendly, helpful and a lot of fun. This is a common theme in Vanuatu, we found.

Friday 14th August 2009:

We were staying at the Beachfront Resort which, as the name suggests, is right on the beach about 2 km out of Luganville which is the main town on Espiritu Santo Island. It's a great place to stay and the outlook over the Second Channel is fantastic.

A little bit of a "sleep in" with rising at 0730 hrs for a lazy breakfast then wait for the bus to take us to the dive site. Bang on time at 08:20 the Aquamarine bus arrives with a medium sized trailer attached. Once all the gear is loaded in the trailer, off we go. Greg from Aquamarine had visited us at the beachfront the night before and, over a Tusker, all the paperwork was completed, C cards sighted and dive procedures explained. So, after the pickup, it was straight to the dive site. Arriving at the site we noticed that the tide was dropping, and the wind was blowing hard, so there was a bit of a chop on the water.



John Prior

The first dive we were to do was the bow of the Coolidge and the reef area under the bow. Max Depth was 30 metres. The Coolidge is laying on her port side. We swam around and underneath the bow (the port side of the ship) where there are a variety of soft and hard corals encrusted on the hull and the adjacent reef. As well as the marine life encrusting the wreck, there is a variety of fish life including lion fish, trigger fish and nudibranchs.

We then swam along the fore deck past the chain locker hatch , the huge anchor winches and the 3-inch bow guns on the port and starboard make for spectacular photo opportunities. From here we to forward holds 1 and 2.

Inside the holds 1 and 2 there were some jeeps, fallen and falling out of the crates, aircraft fuel drop tanks and some large truck chassis. The marine life in the holds was prolific and interesting with wrasse, lion fish, coral trout, and fire clams (more about these babies later). At the entrance to hold 2 there was an electric fan and a typewriter, I would be safe in saying that I doubt that either are now in a serviceable condition. Entering hold two you are greeted with a 5 inch howitzer pointing menacingly outwards.



Not mentioned earlier is the fact that there is a bow line attached to the Coolidge, it runs to but is not connected to two other lines.

One line is running to the Allan Power side of the beach entry, with a well manicured coral garden between a depth of 3 and 6 metres. The other line leads to the Aquamarine side of the beach which has no coral garden to speak of. Also attached to the second line were the sling tanks that were available if we had run low on air which we would need during the lengthy decompression stops required to dive the Coolidge.

It was a great dive; the first sight of the Coolidge is awesome. The dive was to 32.4 metres for 49 minutes, the temp was 26.4C. The visibility, as mentioned, was not particularly good, about 20 metres, no more.

Our next dive was not to commence till after 1400 hrs, giving us at least 3 hours for a surface interval. The recommendation from Greg in the dive shop was to try Le Jardine des Savours, the local French restaurant and patisserie, more of this later.

The second dive of the day was to be a tour along the Promenade Deck. Unfortunately the Promenade Deck can no longer be penetrated for its entire length as much of it has collapsed.

From the bow rope, we passed the anchor chain locker, 1 and 2 holds, and, as we approached the Bridge, what we knew to be a big ship just looks bigger and bigger.

Paul assures me that there was a 32Volt 60 Watt light bulb visible through one porthole we passed along the way.

We progressed along the promenade deck, penetrating the wreck where we could then back past the bridge area. From there we ascended to the starboard side and then along the hull and back to the bow. Sitting on top of the hull there was



heaps of ammunition (disarmed, they assured us) a cooking pot, a couple of M1 rifles and two American GI helmets. Also visible along this section of the hull are the large holes which have been cut into the ship by salvage operators over the years. Within these holes are some of the largest and most colourful gorgonians any of us had ever seen.

Finally we again dropped down along the foredeck returned to the bow and the ascent line, passing a massive anchor lying on the sand below the deck. It appears that this is a spare anchor that fell off the deck and the real anchors are now buried under the sand.

Ascending the line and veering to the left there is a beautiful garden of coral. Industrious AP (Allan Power) diving elves could be seen busying themselves cleaning and preening the garden. These elves did not appear to be very happy with us being on their side of the wall, so, after a good look around, we waved goodbye and drifted out of their sight to the Aquamarine side of the "the wall".

At the deco stop there were small lion fish, blue damsels and fusiliers and we would come to know this area very well in the days to come as we "gassed off" after our dives.

The dive took 40 min to 32.5 metres, the visibility remained about 20 metres and the temperature was 26.8C. After exiting the water, our gear and ourselves were packed away and delivered back to our digs at the Beachfront Hotel for some cleaning of gear and some cool drinks.



Saturday 15th August, 2009:

It seems we are sleeping in later and later each day, Dave has stopped running and Breakfast is getting faster and faster.

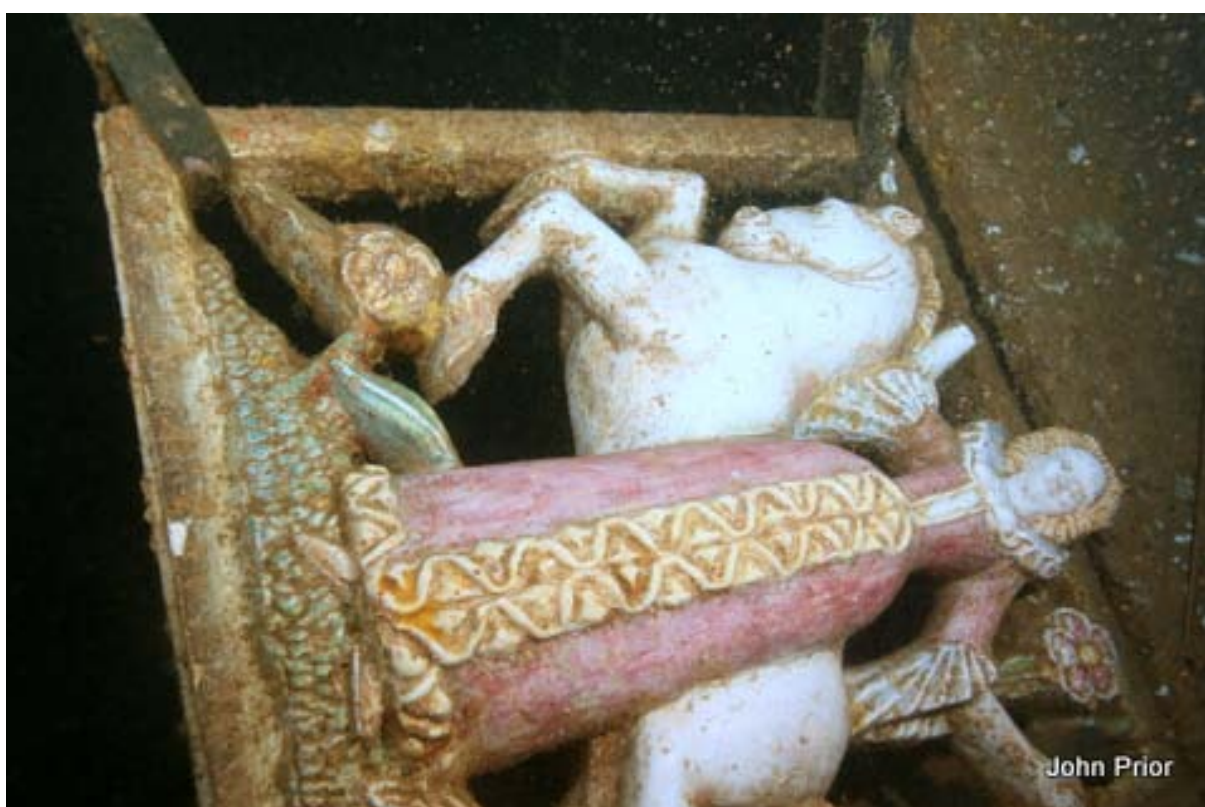
At 08:20 hrs Greg was again waiting next to the truck. Everything was loaded on the truck but we were still standing silently waiting, waiting, waiting, “gee love your company and these quiet moments but...”. It turns out that we were waiting for the ITALIANS! These two guys have been sailing around the world and time was evidently of little concern to them. Bastardos! Eventually they turned up – “in the back of the truck dudes!”.

The first dive of the day, as you may have already concluded, is always the deepest, no reverse profiles here and only two dives a day – no matter what. The second dive was in the process of negotiation, the point of contention being that million dollar point is a relatively shallow dive therefore a third shallow dive would be possible. This did not happen though.

The deep dive today was to be one of the pinnacles of diving the Coolidge – “The Lady”. The lady dive is a penetration dive to a maximum depth of 42 metres.

Entering the water, we kept shallow, approaching the open sea door. From the sea door (referred to as Euart’s door in Michaels notes). We penetrated the first class dining saloon, then along to the opposite wall and down to 41 metres, where the lady now sits and gladly oriented correctly on its side.

Disturbingly there was a testosterone fuelled burst of activity as some club members rushed forward with darting tongues and flailing hands to fondle the statue. Some had been underwater for far too long! On more of a positive note it is ceramic and can be easily cleaned unlike the image of the violation which could not so easily washed away. From this point on I made sure to be the first asleep, and I slept very lightly.



We swam back tracking past the sea door, and rows of twin portholes and brass mushroom ceiling lights. We then moved left down to A deck where the US Army officers accommodation was. There are lots of bare electrical cables on the walls and lino peeling off the floor. Exiting just under the bridge and behind hold 2 we passed holds 2 then onto the crow's nest and the massive anchor laying in the sand. From here we followed the well known track up the line to our decompression stops, where we waited and waited and waited for the Canadian decompression tables which are so very conservative.

The second dive of the day was to be the Million dollar point. But, before this, we were to have lunch followed by the usual coffee and pastry.



Mention is made that we should buy shares in Katherine's restaurant (yes, we are now on first name terms with the owner).

My cholesterol level has hit the critical stage.

We arrived at Million Dollar Point at 1430 hrs, suited up and entered the water. There was an easy 50 metre swim out and then a descent to 10 metres.

The first part of the dive took approximately 25 minutes.



There was so much to see that everyone saw different things, it is basically the biggest junk yard I have ever seen with a huge number of trucks, very large tractors, road rollers and at least one jeep, other vehicles and a wreck, the Jedele (we were told that the Jedele had sunk while attempting to illegally salvage some of the equipment – but Michaels notes say that it was deliberately scuttled).

There is a smaller wreck which appears to be a work boat about 15 metres in length with the hull exposed but no decking. This may be the "El Retiro" that Micheal mentions in his notes although it doesn't look big enough.

Beside the vehicles and vessels there were large quantities of building materials, including scaffolding electrical cabling, and what appeared to be prefabricated buildings. During the dive we were visited by a large school of chevron barracuda, silver drummer, mangrove jack and a very large flat worm. There is so much to see that we spent over an hour perusing the site.



Sunday 16th August 09:

Sleep eat dive, sleep eat dive, the Bram Harris dive holiday mantra.....

Sunday and it's time go to church, well not quite. It's Sunday, must be time to dive the Coolidge engine room - maximum depth 48 metres.

For this dive we surface swam to New Zealand, WELL IT CERTAINLY FELT LIKE IT, then made a u-turn and descended. We followed the buoy line to where there had been attempts to salvage equipment from the engine room.

Penetrating a huge hole cut in the hull by the salvage people takes you straight into the engine room. You drop down onto the port side condenser (the starboard condenser was salvaged according to Michael's website notes).



The Condenser is huge, but then you look up and see the starboard electric motor and you are totally blown away – it's absolutely massive. The size of the propeller shaft attached to the motor is also very impressive. Thanks to the salvage work there is plenty of room to swim around in the engine room.

Grem, our dive guide, took us to the ship's machine control room one a time, as it was a bit cramped. Inside there was a control panel, with large switch levers and many large gauges mounted on the wall. The steam pressure gauge clearly shows 72 psi?



Immediately apparent are the 4 large impressive telegraphs located at the four corners of the room. One of the telegraphs was clean enough for the last command from the bridge to be clearly visible “Stop – Engines no longer required”, a bit of an understatement.

From here we entered the vent duct exiting on the upper deck where the funnels were located. From here we commenced our ascent by swimming along the hull towards the beach. The size of the ship is truly impressive.

We swam underneath and around the bow of the ship looking at a variety of soft and hard corals as well as the marine life making their home on the wreck such as lion fish, trigger fish, nudibranch.

Returning up the line we commenced the greater part of the dive – the decompression period. At least I had a camera to keep me occupied!

Sunday afternoon and it's time to check out the ship's Medical Supplies.

Penetration: mild. Max Depth: 33 metres (110 feet).

Investigate the medical supplies area of the wreck where we were shown syringes, various bottles of medicines and powders, glass IV drip bottles, the doctor's office.

Then on the way back we found aircraft fuel drop tanks and the barber shop with barber chair still intact (although the upholstery could do with a bit of work).

17th August, 2009 Monday:

The French patisserie is closed on Mondays; this was going to be a difficult day!

The deep dive today would be the swimming pool; this would be a non-penetration dive to 57 metres. We again swam in the general direction of New Zealand, stopping this side of the continental shelf. The current is getting stronger and the wind chop is not helping us either. We descended the same buoy line as used for

our attack on the engine room and then moved further along the hull towards the stern until we reached and entered cargo hold 5. We checked the contents in hold 5. Hold 5 was in fact very full of nothing, absolutely nothing.

Just behind hold 5 is the swimming pool itself. Sitting on top of the pool wall was a small anti-tank gun lying upside down with its wheels pointing to god.

Michaels notes indicate that this was used by the troops for gunnery practice during their journey. Past here we approached the top of the pool and entered the pool in a beautifully choreographed sequence that would have made the Australian synchronised swimming team proud.

This was at the deep end of the pool of course - think safety.



We stopped to look at the tiles; we checked the tiles colours and numbers thereof – which is evidently what you're supposed to do in a swimming pool. The tiling is still intact so they must have paid top dollar for the job.

John later confessed to peeing in the pool and has been banned from going in the pool for the rest of the trip. Leaving the pool we swam out

alongside the ship to look back and get a kind of aerial perspective of the ship – a memorable sight. Below us on the sand were the anti-aircraft guns which had fallen from their mounts on the upper deck.



From here we moved up the top deck to the areas where the funnels once were, looking down to the sand below the wreck, the funnels are not visible, maybe they have collapsed and are buried under the sand? There is large open hole forward of the funnel which appears to be where the staircase used to access the lounge area was located.

The wooden staircase has long ago disintegrated.

Further along there are some rows of toilets, that appear to have fallen out of the first class areas and remain connected to their plumbing pipes and are laying upside down in the wreckage.

Moving past the first funnel we then moved past the bridge and onto the starboard side again, proceeding along the starboard side and starting

our ascent. Other dive groups were seen exiting from the 2nd and hold we suspect these divers were from Allan Power dive centre.

At this we must comment that if anyone comes to the Coolidge and is near the pool they should look for a pristine titanium knife complete with scabbard.

Reward offered (100VT) – see Paul.

After sadly not eating French pastries, we commenced the second dive of the day.

The second dive was to be the ABC decks and the chain locker.

Swimming out to a depth of 3 metres we descended and moved onto the bow, from here we moved along the starboard side to the twin sea doors where we entered the hull and proceeded down into the bowels of the ship.



Weaving our way through rusty holes, a tight fit for a diver let alone a diver with twin tanks. We reached a dark hole where our dive guide Pat pulled out some of his treasures, a urine bottle with what appeared to be a pipet in it.

A pair of binoculars and a signal light possibly a navigation light. After returning the treasures to their cache we continued on. We went through so many holes, up

and down, in and out, that it was difficult to work out what deck you were on – but it was a great dive anyways.

There's no way you can really work out the internal layout of the ship in 12 dives, it's just too big. We'll have to make a return trip.

As we continued our dive, squeezing our way over and under obstructions we travelled under hold 2, through hold 1 to enter the chain locker.

There appeared to be steel wire rope curled up and lying in the chain locker, the chain appears to be gone (there's some chain laying on the starboard hull and it's huge). Exiting the chain locker through a hatch onto the deck we ascended to the bow and headed home.

Tuesday 18th August, 2009:

Today was the culmination of the dives to date; we were going to dive to the stern – the deepest part of the ship at nearly 70 metres on the bottom.

The dive got off to a poor start when we noticed John standing at the dive site with a sad look on his face.

He had nothing to attach to his BC - no twins, no singles, nothing. Nobody had packed his tanks on the truck. He was inconsolable – he wouldn't even play with his camera!

Eventually the missing twin 88's arrived by special delivery and all was right with the world once more.

The plan was to swim out to the mid-ships buoy then descend the line about 20 metres before heading down at a 46.2 degree decline to the stern.



The swim out was very tedious as a fairly strong current was running, the water was choppy and we were either running with twins or sling-tanks.

We arrived onto the stern section at a depth 55 metres. Swimming along the starboard hull there was a pretty forest of sea whips.

As we approached the stern the flat side of the ship began to

morph into a beautifully sculpted faring which led us to the starboard propeller shaft at about 62 metres.

The propellers were salvaged years ago and all agreed that this was a great shame as the sight with the propellers would have been fantastic.

Afterward comment was made of the beautiful curves from the hull to the propeller flaring.

Reminiscent of the voluptuous curves of Esther Williams (Thanks Monty). It's interesting to compare the bow of the ship with the stern.

The bow is totally industrial looking without any graceful lines at all whereas the stern is a true work of art (maybe I was just narced?).

Looking up, Paul was straddling the propeller shaft, doing a Cher, quite disturbing really!



John Prior

From this point we moved to look at the rudder, which is, as you would expect, massive in size. We then went over to the top of the stern where the name "COOLIDGE" is letters in brass letters. The letters are surprisingly small for such a huge ship. Most of the letters were obscured by marine growth.



John Prior

Dave was prepared for this and produced a scrubbing brush from his BC and proceeded to buff the lettering. The scrubbing brush had absolutely no effect on the grunge whatsoever so our photo's of the ship's name were rather ordinary.

Dave was hungry after his cleaning and produced a banana from his BC which he proceeded to eat – definitely narced! On the rear deck above the name there was a 5in deck pointing astern. Behind and below the gun was a telegraph for what purpose we could not figure out (maybe when reversing into port?).

After leaving the stern we swam above holds 7 and 6 inside which where 3 inch guns could be seen.

Unfortunately we didn't penetrate these areas as we had already overstayed our time and the dive guide was off like a torpedo! After passing by hold 6 we came to the swimming pool and then we ascended up to the railing and onto the starboard side to commence our ascent. Passing by another small garden of sea whips. We followed along the starboard hull to the bow giving a brilliant view of the actual size of this vessel.

Again today there was a particularly strong current pulling 3 of the divers to the right with one diver swimming to the left and up the AP line to the shore.

Due to the extended deep time today we really paid the penalty with time in deco. We productively spent this time by taking photos of the many unusual (to us) fish and general mischief. Paul still hadn't found his knife and Dave appears to have left his folding knife with Paul's knife.



The second dive of the day was a mystery dive arranged by the DM Roy.

Well, not really a mystery as we knew we were diving on the Coolidge.

We commenced the dive by navigating our way down the line to the bow then along the starboard side then to the bridge and the top deck, entering through the stair well then down into the bottom of the ship. We then worked our way through rusty holes in the plating travelling again under hold 2 and into hold 1.



From hold 1 you can enter a small workshop by swimming through what little of the plating that's left between the two compartments.

In the workshop was a large vice attached to a bench. Twisting our way through another hole in the rusted plating we emerged into the chain locker again and from here we exited, returning to shore for a deco stop which we didn't really need.

Wednesday 19th August, 2009:

This was to be the last day of diving for the 4skin divers, as we had come to be known.

This morning we were doing the last big dive of the trip – “The Gauntlet”.

A dive incorporating the entire length of the ship inside the hull!

The Gauntlet is promoted by Aquamarine as being a dive “not for the faint of heart”.

The scene was set when we awoke, Ray was wandering around the apartment in different levels of dress, humming the theme from “Rocky”, “Gonna Fly Now”

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ioE_O7Lm0I4

Dave was outside on the balcony, limbering up with single armed push ups.

Paul was overcome with the military theme - he was answering all questions with “YO!”. Even when asked if he’d like “coffee or tea?”.

John was far too interested in the free broadband access at the Beachfront to be healthy. The bus arrived and we boarded and set off – feeling very pumped up. deep down, those of us with the memory of yesterday were hoping the current on the swim out would be a lot more kind to us today.

The entry was the same as for all our other deep dives, damned low tide, bugger. We had packed lunches and something to drink for the walk to the water. Having walked half way to the continental United States we had to then swim the remaining distance into wind chop and the dreaded current.

Surprisingly we reached the buoy on the same day we set off, possible due to the affects of the international date line. Paul and John had twins and “The New Dave” and Ray had a single 88 with a sling tank each.

We wondered why we didn’t do this as a boat dive. The sight of a bunch old guys gasping for breath doesn’t appear to me to be a particularly attractive one.



After regaining our breath we descending to 58.6 metres and swam along the starboard hull to a ventilation shaft located just behind hold 7 through which we entered the hull. We then entered hold 7 inside which were a number of anti-tank

guns. We didn't have much time to look for anything else as the DM had already warned us we'd have no time to goof around on this dive.

Moving under the pool to hold 6 we found piles of ammunition 30 06 and 50 calibre laying *higgledy piggledy* on the port side of the hold. From hold 6 we entered the huge galley, don't remember how many twists and turns we went through to get there but when we arrived there were all the cookers and large boilers laying below us and serving benches still fastened to the floor. From here we moved past the crockery store which is still stocked.

From the crockery store we entered the main dining room, which was a huge open area with large beams from the floor to the ceiling. We navigated past the large hole where the large stair well used to be and from here to moved past the motors of one of the ships elevators with the security gate laying in the empty elevator well.

We navigated some tight squeezes and turns as we continued on our way. At one point there was a loud, deep meditative "bong" sound , no one admitted to banging into anything so we think we may have been followed by some other divers.

We eventually appeared in good old number 2 hold. We've now been here too many times and I'm not going to talk about it again. From here to hold 1 ditto read above then the anchor chain hold and out, all up that took 25 min and we headed off to the deco position and the lie and up our 4 deco stops, 12, 9, 6, 3, metres for far too long.

Our last dive was to be a night dive with the primary goal of seeing the famous Coolidge flashlight fish.

After our morning dive we had the afternoon off so we ended up with an incredibly long surface interval of 7 hrs and 10 min. We spent this time wisely - eating pastries and drinking coffee.

Meeting at the dive shop at 1700 hrs we met up with "the castaways" (two NZ girls who were on a boat that broke down and they were "stuck" on Santo).

We had all geared down to single tanks and no sling tanks.

The tide was the highest we'd seen. Paul and John were the lightest (no twins) since we started the deeper dives, also there was no wind and the seas were totally flat, why could it not have been like this on our deep dives?

Descending we followed the contour along the line to the bow. The plan was for us to do hold 1 and the castaways were to do hold 2.

Penetrating hold 1 we were again shown one of the resident fire clams. I had never seen these fire clams (*Lima Scabra*) before and they are absolutely amazing critters. They are a beautiful vermillion red in colour but the best part is that they have luminous cells on their mantle that can be lit up in an electric-blue colour. This gives the effect of electric sparks running across the mantle of the clam. This is totally mesmerising to watch. Here's a link to a video of a fire clam in "sparky mode". <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dUUoP7miwsM>



After waiting for a few hours for John to get a nice photo of the fire clam, we turned out our torches and waited for the flashlight fish to come out. After a while a wave of flashlight fish could be seen coming towards us from further up the hold. It was particularly eerie to watch this sparkling mass swarm around us. Watching them is totally fascinating and you could watch them for hours. After a while they will swim around your head –

this is an experience which you'll never forget. At one point, the castaways turned on their torches and some light shone into our hold causing the flashlight fish to quickly swim away. We then discovered that Dave can actually swear at people under water! They obviously heard as darkness returned and so did the flashlight fish - onya Dave!

It was agreed by all that this was an amazing way to finish what was a very successful trek.

Aquamarine run a great dive operation. We found them organised, friendly, helpful, safety conscious and whole lot more. Their dive guides are excellent and nothing seems to trouble them. It was a real pleasure to deal and dive with these guys.

Sources of information. The dives and the participants.

...Paul Pacey trip organiser, Ray Moulang, David Burns and John Prior.

Big blue <http://www.bigbluevanuatu.com/>

Aquamarine <http://www.aquamarinesanto.com/>

Michael McFadyen: <http://www.michaelmcfadyenscuba.info/news.php>

More pictures from the trip.



This is us (John, Paul, George and Ringo) with the infamous Roy who has had thousands of dives on the Coolidge.



Been there-
-done that.

What's next?

Club Social Night Out.

Christmas in July – 25th July 2009 by Ron Walsh.



Christmas in July was once again held at Heathcote Services Club, with 24 members attending.

Everyone was in fine Christmas spirit, with several people even wearing Christmas hats.

The night started at 6pm, with drinks.

Each setting had bon bons, which once cracked produced toys and terrible jokes.

Unfortunately nearly everyone had the same terrible joke!

Bottles of red and white wine appeared on the tables, and mysteriously over the night disappeared (as in drunk).

Three course dinner was devoured, including roast turkey with the trimmings and Christmas pudding with custard.

A band played music, people danced, talked, laughed. All in all a great night

Many thanks to Peter Flockart for organising.



Philippines -- Manta Rays - Whale Sharks - and a Volcano

12 days leaving about mid March 2010.

17 Dives + 2 days of snorkelling with the whale sharks (this is high season with a 98% strike rate), all accommodation and breakfast and dinners for 6 nights whilst on Ticao Island, transfers from airports ----- \$1400.00!!!! - how cheap + wait for it -- yes a full day trek up an active volcano -- just to let off a little steam..

Airfares look to be around \$1200 return.

NEED to confirm numbers to lock in the deal.

Expect to pay say \$500.00 - \$700.00 deposit using frequent flyers for airfares or about \$1300.00 deposit for all inclusive.

Deposits etc will be payable in August - September.

Limited spots -- I have 6 names -- there are two spots. -- Cheers - Mark Ridsdale.



FOR SALE: NEW size 4 men's (med) Sonar Corsica semi-dry 6mm wetsuit.

<http://www.sonarwetsuits.com.au/corsica.html>

Currently residing with Greg Blackburne. \$200

Aqualung Titan Reg, ocy and 2 gauge combo (imperial gauges). The Titan regulator series features a balanced diaphragm first stage that is equipped with the "Air Turbo System," an additional channel built into the first stage designed to boost the breathing performance of the regulator

1. Proven Titan balanced diaphragm first stage, Air Turbo System
 2. Compact 1st stage design, High-performance, mid-sized second stage
 3. Diver-controlled Venturi Adjustment Switch (VAS) reduces sensitivity to free flow on the surface and provides maximum airflow at depth
 4. Exclusive Comfo-Bite™ mouthpiece virtually eliminates jaw fatigue
- 4 low pressure ports and 1 high pressure port,
 - All ports angled for optimum hose position. New ABS Octopus combines excellent breathing performance with the benefits of a low profile body style.
 - Suunto Combos. pressure and depth Package price \$400 in new condition. Please contact Grant Moulang Grant@blueoceanic.com for further info/details on the regs. Contact Greg Blackburne at Greg@blueoceanic.com can arrange viewing/ try on for the semidry suit.

Regular events

THURSDAY NIGHT DIVES

We have had some record turnouts for the night dives. Most of the dives have been very good, with nice visibility and good fish life. Contact Michael if interested.

Other Dives

Many other dives are advised in the news section of the Club's web site.

If you are interested in a dive, have a look at the news section a few days before a weekend and you may find others already planning a dive.

You can also place your own news item there (but remember it may take time to appear as it needs to be authorised by a web site administrator).

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Please send items for the Newsletter to me ***as you do them during the month*** with a deadline of 25th of the month.