



Sea Braggin'

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

July 2008

Chuuk Lagoon Away Trip

May 2008

by Jason Coombs

Many will be aware of the drama that has been the planning for our trip to Chuuk Lagoon aboard the SS Thorfinn liveaboard. Last year the ship hit a reef after collecting a load of oil and was to be back in the water by Christmas. In fact it was back in the water only one month before our expedition.

But no complaining, as the originals - Paul Watkinson, Janine Jenkins and I referred to ourselves - were treated to a 20% discount. Joining the originals were latecomers Mark Ridsdale, Paul Pacey and Bram Harris who booked after the boat had sunk – what faith!

The Thorfinn is an ex whaling and seal hunting steam ship that Captain Lance Higgs had bought many years ago and by his own admission, turned into a floating gin palace with carefree souls coming and going never sure who was sleeping with whom and even who was on board. He actually looked misty eyed as he recounted the stories of years ago.

To describe Captain Lance as a colourful character would be an understatement. He is married to a Chuukese local after previously being married to two of her aunties. He has a brood of children in his native Canada as well as those in Chuuk. And he's 73 years old.

Having been in Chuuk since 1980, he knows a great deal about the wrecks and the history of Chuuk as well as the ships sunk there. This made for some interesting and informative stories at the end of each day's diving and some real insights to the wrecks we were diving. He claims the Thorfinn is the oldest liveaboard still going and among the originals if not the first.

As for the Thorfinn we had 6 people from St George as well as Kathy (also from Sydney who

we met up with in Cairns) and 5 kiwis from the Urunui Dive Club in Taranaki, NZ. So I was among friends and countrymen. Urunui is Maori for big d*ck which made them big d*ck divers – I really want to join the club just so I can say that!



The Thorfinn taken from the back of one of the dive tenders – by Jason Coombs

With 11 divers on board there was plenty of room including a saltwater spa pool on the deck in which you could relax at the end of each day. The boat can accommodate 22 divers but I think it would have been fairly tight with that many on board. The week before they had had only 3 and previously a guy had turned up on his own for a fantastic trip where he was the centre of attention!

The Thorfinn doesn't travel very far, in fact it doesn't go anywhere. That task rests with the tenders; large inflatables with seats with which you can lift the lid and store your gear within, which is great. And they fly over the very flat water to each of the dive sites.

We were picked up on the first day from the Truk Stop Hotel where we had spent the night. After arriving at the Thorfinn and getting our bearings we were shown our rooms, which were easily the largest I have ever had on a liveaboard.

As I have pointed out Chuuk Lagoon is flat, really flat and we had no real current on any of the dives we did. It rained a fair bit (we were told there is no rainy season it just rains when it rains) and vis was limited to less than 10metres on the dives nearer the islands while those out by the barrier reef were consistently 20metres plus and sometimes much more.

a few metres of the surface it was easy enough to pass the time during the stops.

Of the dives we did almost all were freighters with a couple of cruise ships, (used to support the submarines), a flying boat and a bomber. On the last day we also did a shark attraction dive.



Grey Whaler Shark – by Jason Coombs

A small tank on the deck of the Nippon Maru – by Jason Coombs

Over the 7 diving days we were on board I did 21 dives though others did more including Bram who did a mighty 5 dives in one day. While the dives were generally 30metres plus the deepest I got to was 49metres on the deck of the San Francisco Maru.

On the various dives we saw plates, gas masks, torpedos, battleship shells, trucks, bulldozers, gauges, ammunition, mines, tanks etc. It is fair to say that I'm not in a hurry to see another engine room!

Given the obvious risks of repetitive deep diving there was a system used on all dives, whether you went into deco or not, as follows:

While I could wax on about all the dives I will just describe my favourite, which will not be a surprise to many who have been to Chuuk, is the Fujikawa Maru. It is a freighter sitting in only 30metres with the large gantries coming up to within 5 metres of the surface.

- 2 minute stop @ 18metres
- 3 minute stop @ 9metres
- 10 minute stop @ 5metres

We picked in on the gantry just behind the bridge and made our way along the side past the bridge to the bow. On the second of the two dives we did on this wreck we could see grey whaler sharks circling on the sand below us.

With the sheer numbers of divers doing repetitive dives at depth the Thorfinn has attracted the attention of some of the leading hyperbaric doctors who have apparently visited and endorsed the system. Given the huge gantries on a number of wrecks coming to within

The bow gun is huge and makes for a great silhouette shot. From there you drop into the forward hold where there are thousands of champagne and beer bottles and wine glasses with broken glass everywhere.

You move from there to the next hold which has an enormous hole in the bottom, the steel looks like it's been peeled back like a banana after being hit by a torpedo.

From there it's up onto the deck level and into the engine room (yes another engine room). This one, given my new found expertise on such matters, was on the small side but very

accessible, with a large open space above the main engine and an adjacent workshop.



Paul Pacey looking out of one of the gun turrets – by Jason Coombs

Leaving the engine room you move up the stairs and look into the bathhouse with its porcelain tiled square baths and basins. From here you move to the next hold full of ammunition, mostly boxes of bullets, but also guns.

Paul thought it would be a great idea for me to photograph him holding a gun. While things are not as heavy under water this gun was still heavy and he ended up doing funky dance on the bottom as he tried to keep balance. I nearly flooded my mask laughing and didn't get a very good shot – his bad luck.

The last hold has the parts of Japanese 'Zero' fighter aircraft. Anyone who made the old Airfix kitset airplanes when they were growing up will relate to what this looked like. The fuselage was in one piece with the tail and cockpit. The wings were separate and there were even propellers waiting to be attached.

This sight especially reinforced just what great condition everything is in, in Chuuk Lagoon. After more than 60 years it seems as though it will all still be there is another 60!

The Fujikawa Maru was one of the best wrecks for marine life as well. Apart from the grey whaler sharks, there were schools of big eye trevally, batfish and also an excellent flatworm I saw on both dives.

While I know you are supposed to be there for the wrecks, I found the marine life surprisingly good. We even had a dolphin swim past us on the Betty Bomber dive – now that doesn't happen very often!

Chuuk Lagoon itself is an interesting place to visit. The main town (I'm not sure what is called) has the worst roads however the people live a very simple subsistence lifestyle. There is 95% unemployment with most people living in villages on the different islands and accepting sometimes there is electricity and sometimes there isn't.



The façade of the Japanese hospital – by Jason Coombs

Every time there is a proposal for some glitzy resort with golf course etc. it gets knocked back. In fact the people probably live a very sustainable lifestyle mainly surviving on breadfruit and other local staples. You can get the retirement benefit in your mid-fifties but given most locals don't live beyond 60 its not that much of a luxury.

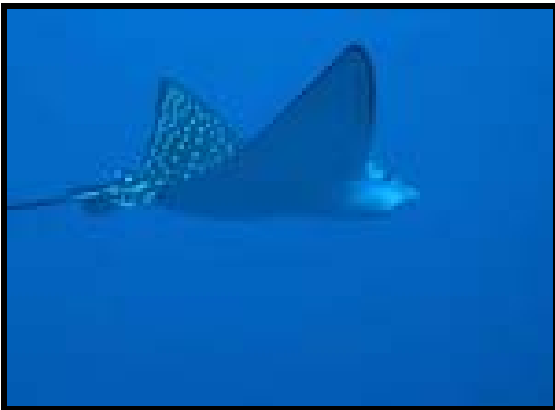
We got a good appreciation of how the locals suffered at the hands of the Japanese and the supposedly liberating allied forces from the tours we did. There are a number of facilities, built to withstand heavy artillery, still in use today on the islands.



Flatworm on the Fujikawa Maru – by Jason Coombs

During the trip we had to endure some of the teething problems associated with a recently refurbished ship including a couple of cabins partially flooding and the water being turned off on a regular basis. Its fair to say the food had good and bad days as well.

In terms of a liveaboard for Chuuk none of the 6 of us had been there before and we found this to be a great way to get acquainted with the diving that's on offer. While I'm not one of the all time big wreck diving fans I really enjoyed the dives especially the Fujikawa Maru and the Nippon Maru. I was also pleasantly surprised by the marine life including the extensive soft and hard corals, sharks and eagle rays on the wrecks.



Spotted Eagle Ray – by Jason Coombs

As for all those engine rooms they were pumping!!!

Just a quick plug for the Ocean Graphics torch that Michael has organised at wholesale prices for the club. Mark Ridsdale and I had one each for the trip and there's no better testing ground engine rooms (have I mentioned those), ships holds and night dives as well as lots of dives - requiring quick charging.

Well they didn't skip a beat. Easy to use, easy disconnect for charging, quick to charge up including 110v and 240v if required and bright enough that I am now using a standard 20watt bulb (providing 90 minutes burn time) giving me all the light I could need. And all for a price well short of \$300. Excellent!

So thank you to Paul Watkinson for organising the trip, well eventually, and sometimes even turning up to be my buddy... now that's another story.

REGULAR EVENTS

Monthly Meetings

The next meeting of the St George Scuba Club will be held on 16th July 2008 at the St. George Rowing Club, 1 Levey Street Woolli Creek at 8.00 pm. Come along about 7 pm and enjoy a meal at the bistro.

Thursday Night Dives

If you do not currently get the email each week advising the location of the dive, please email michael@michaelmcfadyenscuba.info and advise that you would like to be added to the list.

Please make sure that you let Michael McFadyen know if you are coming in case the weather means we need to move or cancel the dive.

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).

UP AND COMING EVENTS

Deep Wreck Dive – Long Reef 19th July 2008

If you are interested in coming, please contact Peter Flockart ph.9371 0265.

Christmas in July

26th July 2008 at 7.30pm
Heathcote Services & Citizens Club
24 Oliver Street
\$ 22 (approx) per person

(Last year the club included a free bottle of wine for every four people) They will probably do the same this year.

If you would like to attend email me your names. Last yr all who attended had a fabulous time.

Regards, Peter Flockart ph. 9371 0265

Port Stephens Away Trip

Superb shore dives. Great boat dives. Warmer water. Yes, it has it all.

The trip is for the weekend of August 2nd & 3rd. The plan is an excellent shore dive each morning on the high tide, followed by a stunning boat dive with ProDive the afternoon.

The accommodation and boat dives will cost about \$220 each (depending on numbers).

To secure a spot contact Brian Byrnes (brian.byrnes@pobox.com, 41982 2243), and pay a \$50 deposit to Mark.

**Boat Dive – The Colours
10th August 2008**

If you are interested in coming, please contact Jason Coombs Ph. 9345 4599.

Morton Bay Trip on Big Cat Reality

Unfortunately, Big Cat Reality is booked out for the week-end that we had planned (18-21 July). However, they have spots available on the week-end of 8th – 10th August.

The cost is \$600 which includes:

- 8 Dives
- Tanks and weights
- Accommodation and all meals aboard Big Cat Reality, Fri (night), Sat, Sun + breakfast Mon
- Transport to and from Brisbane Airport
- Dive Master Services (required in QLD)
- Fuel levy

More info about the boat and diving can be found at <http://www.bigcatreality.com/>

Flights to/from Brisbane to be booked individually in addition to the above cost.

Please contact Kelly if you are interested in this trip.



SKI WEEKEND

22nd – 24 August 2008

If you are interested in this trip please contact Eddie Ivers ph. 9526 5910.

**Boat Dive / BBQ – La Perouse
31st August 2008**

If you are interested in coming, please contact Kelly McFadyen
kelly@michaelmcfadyenscuba.info

**FOSTER WEEKEND AWAY -
SEPTEMBER - 19TH to 21ST - 2008**

Divers,

I have a booking for 8 Divers for this weekend, diving with Ron Hunter out of Fisherman's Wharf.

Its really great diving up there, I will arrange the Sitara wreck dive, usually on the Saturday if there are enough divers to go out.

Other spectacular dives include

- THE PINNACLES
- EDITH REEFS
- SEAL ROCKS SHARKS

Please contact Dave Burns Ph. 9531 4403 if you are interested.

Palau Trip – Oct / Nov 2008

Dave Cash is organising this trip. Please contact him for details . 07 55 186 184.

FULL

OTHER NEWS

For Sale: Olympus C-5060 Accessories

Janine Jenkins (m 0412 508 377) has the following items for sale:

Item	Paid	Used
Olympus PT-020 housing rated to 40m to fit C-5060	450.00	twice
Inon D-180 Strobe with Diffuser	792.00	once
Inon Fibre Optic Cable	143.00	once
Full Ultra Light Dual Tray, Handle and Ball Joint Arm System	538.00	twice
Olympus 0.7X Wide Conversion Lens WCON-07C	325.00	new
Olympus Conversion Lens Adapter CLA-7	70.00	new
Inon UCL-165 M67 (2x) Macro Lens	275.00	new
Inon Dual M67 Lens Holder	110.00	new
Athena Optical 100 Wide Zoom Port (OPD-100WZ)	660.00	new
Olympus Wide Lens and Step Adaptor Ring for C-5060	418.00	new
	3,781.00	

Reasonable offers will be accepted.

THAILAND MARCH 2009

Feeling adventurous - the following is some prices for a trip to the Simian Islands leaving Phuket for 4 days (5 Nights) on a liveaboard. Total of 4 days diving = 16 dives. the average cost per dive after discount assuming 28 baht :\$Aud is about \$56.00.

I have dived with these guys before and now they have a new boat which looks great.

Obviously it would be great to stitch this excursion with an extended holiday. There are deals to be done or alternatively those that wish to stitch their own deal due to frequent flyers and timeshares can do so.

Indicative cost assuming Aud:28Baht and after 20% discount is detailed below.

The boat with all in cost is \$900 - \$1000 for the 16 dives.

Deals regularly offered is stay 8 nights, including airfares and transfers for about \$1300 - \$1400. Add some spending money (Guys add \$1.50, girls \$1500.00) and that would be about right. I guess a budget of \$3000 will see you sloshed, well feed and some tailor made gear to bring home.

Check out the website www.diveasia.com the new boat comes on line in November 2008.

Thinking about the trip SM 28 - 14th - 18th March 09.

What I have done in the past is to arrive in Phuket in the AM of departure of the dive boat - check what I gear I don't want with the hotel I am booked to stay with when I get off the boat. Spend that day at the hotel (pool etc) and then get picked up and delivered back to the hotel - works well

For those that are serious a deposit will be required say 25% of the Dive boat cost (\$say \$250.00) to secure your spot. Let me know whether you want a Travel Deal or whether you want to do your own thing.

Will be confirming in about 60 days time with Dive Asia - so check out your holidays and \$\$\$cash availability.

Please contact Mark Ridsdale if you are interested Ph. 0419 243717

Sydney Tides July 2008

Day	High	Low	High	Low	High
Tue 1		12:28 AM EST / 0.28 m	6:20 AM EST / 1.22 m	11:56 AM EST / 0.39 m	6:35 PM EST / 1.86 m
Wed 2		1:27 AM EST / 0.18 m	7:22 AM EST / 1.24 m	12:54 PM EST / 0.36 m	7:30 PM EST / 1.93 m
Thu 3		2:22 AM EST / 0.11 m	8:18 AM EST / 1.26 m	1:49 PM EST / 0.34 m	8:23 PM EST / 1.95 m
Fri 4		3:13 AM EST / 0.09 m	9:11 AM EST / 1.28 m	2:42 PM EST / 0.34 m	9:14 PM EST / 1.92 m
Sat 5		4:03 AM EST / 0.11 m	10:01 AM EST / 1.29 m	3:35 PM EST / 0.36 m	10:05 PM EST / 1.86 m
Sun 6		4:52 AM EST / 0.16 m	10:53 AM EST / 1.31 m	4:30 PM EST / 0.42 m	10:54 PM EST / 1.75 m
Mon 7		5:38 AM EST / 0.24 m	11:43 AM EST / 1.33 m	5:26 PM EST / 0.49 m	11:42 PM EST / 1.62 m
Tue 8		6:21 AM EST / 0.32 m	12:33 PM EST / 1.36 m	6:23 PM EST / 0.57 m	
Wed 9	12:29 AM EST / 1.48 m	7:01 AM EST / 0.41 m	1:24 PM EST / 1.38 m	7:25 PM EST / 0.65 m	
Thu 10	1:17 AM EST / 1.34 m	7:41 AM EST / 0.49 m	2:17 PM EST / 1.41 m	8:33 PM EST / 0.69 m	
Fri 11	2:11 AM EST / 1.22 m	8:23 AM EST / 0.55 m	3:12 PM EST / 1.44 m	9:44 PM EST / 0.70 m	
Sat 12	3:13 AM EST / 1.13 m	9:09 AM EST / 0.59 m	4:04 PM EST / 1.48 m	10:48 PM EST / 0.66 m	
Sun 13	4:16 AM EST / 1.09 m	9:59 AM EST / 0.60 m	4:52 PM EST / 1.52 m	11:42 PM EST / 0.59 m	
Mon 14	5:14 AM EST / 1.09 m	10:48 AM EST / 0.59 m	5:37 PM EST / 1.57 m		
Tue 15		12:29 AM EST / 0.51 m	6:06 AM EST / 1.11 m	11:36 AM EST / 0.56 m	6:21 PM EST / 1.61 m
Wed 16		1:11 AM EST / 0.44 m	6:54 AM EST / 1.14 m	12:23 PM EST / 0.52 m	7:03 PM EST / 1.66 m
Thu 17		1:49 AM EST / 0.37 m	7:37 AM EST / 1.18 m	1:07 PM EST / 0.48 m	7:43 PM EST / 1.69 m
Fri 18		2:26 AM EST / 0.32 m	8:16 AM EST / 1.22 m	1:48 PM EST / 0.45 m	8:20 PM EST / 1.72 m
Sat 19		3:02 AM EST / 0.29 m	8:55 AM EST / 1.25 m	2:27 PM EST / 0.44 m	8:57 PM EST / 1.72 m
Sun 20		3:37 AM EST / 0.28 m	9:33 AM EST / 1.28 m	3:05 PM EST / 0.45 m	9:32 PM EST / 1.71 m
Mon 21		4:12 AM EST / 0.28 m	10:11 AM EST / 1.31 m	3:45 PM EST / 0.48 m	10:09 PM EST / 1.68 m
Tue 22		4:47 AM EST / 0.30 m	10:52 AM EST / 1.35 m	4:29 PM EST / 0.51 m	10:47 PM EST / 1.63 m
Wed 23		5:23 AM EST / 0.33 m	11:34 AM EST / 1.38 m	5:18 PM EST / 0.55 m	11:29 PM EST / 1.54 m
Thu 24		6:00 AM EST / 0.37 m	12:19 PM EST / 1.42 m	6:15 PM EST / 0.58 m	
Fri 25	12:17 AM EST / 1.43 m	6:42 AM EST / 0.41 m	1:11 PM EST / 1.47 m	7:23 PM EST / 0.59 m	
Sat 26	1:15 AM EST / 1.31 m	7:31 AM EST / 0.46 m	2:12 PM EST / 1.52 m	8:45 PM EST / 0.57 m	
Sun 27	2:30 AM EST / 1.20 m	8:31 AM EST / 0.49 m	3:19 PM EST / 1.58 m	10:08 PM EST / 0.49 m	
Mon 28	3:55 AM EST / 1.14 m	9:38 AM EST / 0.50 m	4:25 PM EST / 1.66 m	11:21 PM EST / 0.38 m	
Tue 29	5:11 AM EST / 1.14 m	10:45 AM EST / 0.47 m	5:27 PM EST / 1.75 m		
Wed 30		12:24 AM EST / 0.27 m	6:17 AM EST / 1.18 m	11:48 AM EST / 0.42 m	6:26 PM EST / 1.83 m
Thu 31		1:19 AM EST / 0.19 m	7:13 AM EST / 1.24 m	12:46 PM EST / 0.36 m	7:20 PM EST / 1.89 m

The Committee for 2007 – 2008 is:

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Please send items for the Newsletter to me by the 28th of the month