



June 2023 Newsletter



**Galapagos Whaler
Lord Howe Island**

**Photo
David Short**

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Girls Dive Weekend, Jervis Bay
18 & 19 March 2023
Text and photos courtesy of Tordis

It's always with excitement I set out for the annual girls dive weekend it the beautiful Jervis Bay.

Love this part of the gorgeous South Coast, and it's even more easy to get to now after the Albion Park Bypass.

Planning and packing the week prior and watching the weather and swell conditions. "Yes, yes it's looking great, hopefully we'll be able to dive on the outside". Our house in a quiet street in Huskisson was beautifully decked out, spacious and well set up for drying gear.



Saturday's first dive site was called The Gap, located on the southeast side of Bowen Island. The island gave us shelter from the heavy northerly swell. Looking eastwards was all whitecaps. Definitely

swimming back to the boat. Headed off in a north easterly direction and swam over bare rocks at 12 meters before finding gorgeous sponge gardens down to 30 meters. Sandy bottom on 36-38 meters. Spotted a rather large nudibranch (close to 10 cm) and found it is a *Halgerda willeyi*. Wobbegongs were plenty and good fish life with 15 – 20 meters viz made it a beautiful dive.



The Skipper opted for second dive on the inside at The Docks. Probably one of the best dives there I have ever had. Never seen the species of Leather Jacket before and could not find it on the google search results either, with its many images of 'leather jackets' 😊. Feel free to flick me an email with the ID. Followed the wall on our right down to the cave, with Eastern Blue Devil Fish, Wobbies everywhere, big schools of Pomfrets, finished the dive around Deco rock with schools of yellowtail in the thousands. Another fun dive, viz not quiet as brilliant as the first dive, but no complaints.

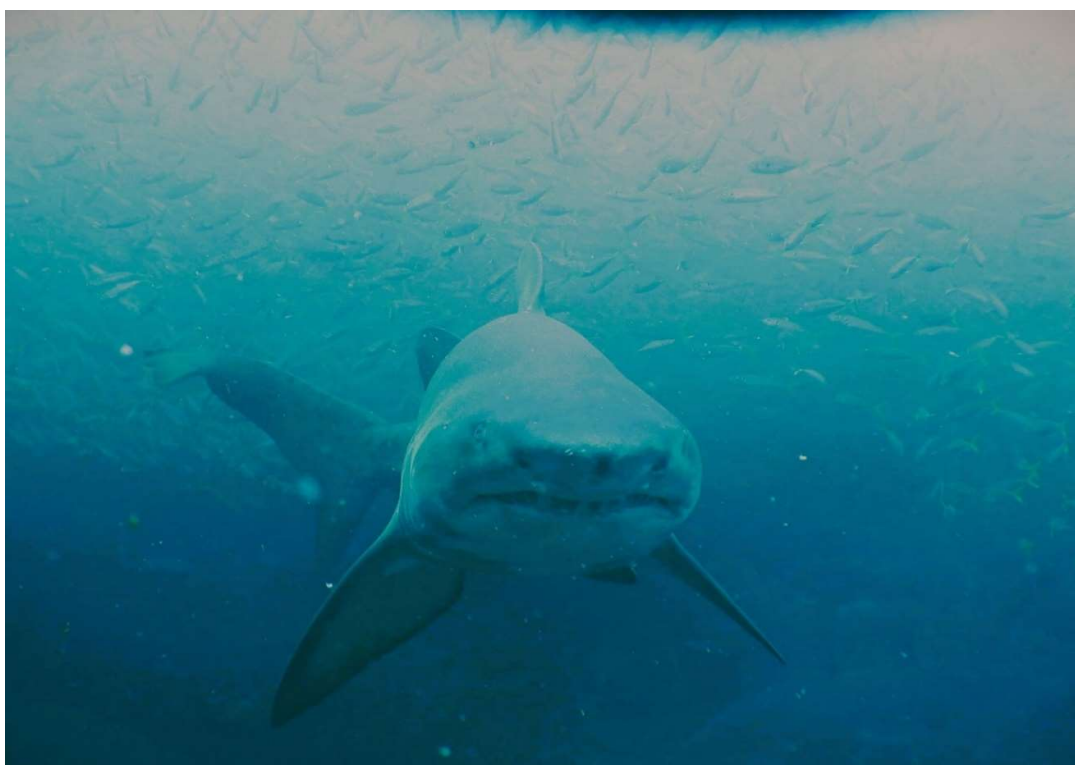
Time for siesta, happy hour and a great dinner the Huskisson pub.

The Sunday swell had settled down considerably, and we were told we were off to Alissa's Playground. We headed south, far south and Donna had a pale facial expression "where the hell are we going?" We finally pulled up in the Wreck Bay area and got in the water. The dive site got its name from a young diver that had so much fun there and thought it was the best site ever, hence she got a dive site named after her. The dive crew had been there the week before and knew this was where the grey nurse sharks were congregating in large numbers. The area is in a protection zone.

Max depth for this dive was around 24 meters around huge boulders with nice sponge growth and great fish life. On the first dive we came across a very friendly turtle that would not leave us along. It wanted to play and be scratched and posed willingly for the photographer. We found more *Halgerda* nudies, saw school of juvenile Kingfish and then found the grey nurse sharks. Wow, there would have been up 50 of them, all amongst schools of yellowtail, so thick you could not see through. Second dive we started a little further south and swap around the point, taking us back to the sharks but from the other side.

Thank you Donna, Shelly and Kelly for an amazing weekend. Photos by Tordis & her little Nikon Coolpix 600.





Club trip to Montague Island

Photos and text Lynne Tuck

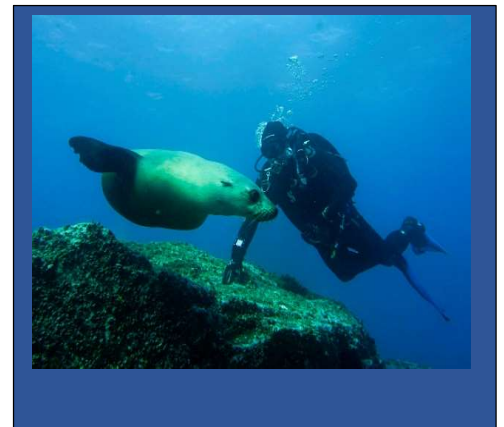
What a great weekend we had diving 19th to the 21st of May, with the Fur Seals on Montague Island. Thanks to Mike Scotland for organising this trip.

Friday mornings dive was in a protected bay further south west of the seals due to it being too windy to dive with them. My highlight of this dive was spotting a juvenile reindeer fish, but it darted away before I could get a photo. Mike said he spotted 25 different species of wrasse. There was also a trio of Moorish Idols.

Luckily, by the next dive the wind had dropped and we were able to dive with the seals. Most of the dive group disappeared around the corner, Mike and I stayed up in the shallows and had some great interaction with cheeky seal pups and a few curious adults. I had so much fun diving with seals, I must admit I must look like a total idiot! I try to imitate what the seals are doing whether it's hanging upside down, spinning around or growling. When they come close I take my reg out and growl back, you can actually hear them vocalising through the water. They also do this jerky head movement, and if you do it back they will spin around and around you, coming in close, I had a few bite onto my fins, having a play. Saturday mornings dive had two boats going out. One with Underwater safaris and the other with Island charters, both good operators.

I was on Norms boat with island charters, we dived a different location as the day before, I Don't think there were as many pups here but still had two great dives. The current was pretty strong and we could only get to a certain area but we still had plenty of seal action. My highlight was the last ten minutes of my last dive, a cheeky seal pup harassed Mike, his snorkel and his camera for a good ten minutes. I could see him laughing at the pups antics, I'm still waiting to see your photos Mike!

It's worth a walk down to "Australia Rock" to catch a beautiful sunrise or the seals hanging out on the sea wall at the entrance to the harbour, when a large fishing boat goes past, the younger seals jump in to play in the vessels wake, I should have taken my zoom lens! I'd like to thank everyone who organises these group dive trips, I know there is a lot of organising in the background and we all appreciate it.





Club boat dive. Barrens Hut

Saturday 13 May 2023

Argonaut was the only available boat for this dive and conditions were far from perfect with more wind and swell than forecast.

Four divers, Ian, Linda, Bob and Phil dived Barrens Hut. Visibility was down to about 5 metres with a slight current from the north. Usual fish life for the site and a couple of large wobbies were found.

An average dive made worse when one of our number cut their hand when caught between the ladder and the boat.

Guide to travelling and diving Sabang Beach, Philippines Text by Dick Fish

A Rough Guide to Sabang Beach

Hello fellow St George Divers, over the years I have been asked how to go diving in Philippines. Here is my cut on the story to dive Sabang Beach Mindoro. A great place to cut your teeth as an independent diver in the Philippines.

From Manila airport.

Terminal 3 is a total mess. Getting a taxi is basically a free for all. Best to try to download the app "Grab". It's the Philippines equivalent of Uber. Just put in your destination and you will get a price, I would pay no more than 600 peso.

Alternatively you could use a taxi; the yellow taxis are expensive but clean. Look at around 500 peso for the ride. For those who are brave, take the white taxi, they are not so good in condition but always provide an interesting journey. With all Manila taxi rides make sure the meter is started and that it's not running at a crazy speed. They seem to be able to trick the meter to run faster somehow.

Terminal 2 is easy, it has better controls there but the same rules apply as any taxi ride in Manila.

A good tip is to be seen photographing the number plate before departure. (It seems to stop the naughtiness.)

The taxi driver may ask to use the "Skyway" it's not a bad option depending on the time of day. Be aware you will need to pay the tolls.

I find the best place to get the local currency is to get it at the airport ATM's, the best ATM's are BDO or BPI. They limit you to 10,000p per transaction and charge 250p to use their ATM's.

Accommodation

I like to stay in the Ermita / Malate area. There are heaps of cheapish hotels to stay in. It's the old part of Manila and the area of the expats, it feels like Asia.

A more up market area is Makati, it's far cleaner and safer but it's just like home, you don't get the real Asian feel there. The hotels here can be very expensive hence I don't go there.

For the first timers, stay at the City State Hotel, it is run down but has better rooms at reasonable rate. Go to Website <https://citystatetower.hotels-manila.com/en/>

Other Options are to Stay at serviced Apartments, I suggest JMM serviced apartments.

Cheaper than hotels and has Roberson's Mall across the street. Roberson's Mall has plenty of places to eat and a supermarket.

Getting to Sabang

It was once very easy but now it's hard. Since the change in the Government the new rules have added costs and complexity to this journey. A good example is how you need a "Tourist Entry QR code", it's free but you need a confirmed Hotel booking reference number. Go to website <https://registration.amazingpuertogalera.com/>.

It was once just a short taxi ride to "Beundia" area, get a JAM bus to Batangas pier and buy a ticket on Father and Sons pump boat direct to Sabang all for under 500p.

Forget that! It's now a long winded path to Sabang free lancing now.

The best, easiest way to get to Sabang is to buy a combined ticket at the City State hotel.

The service is called "Sikat" and costs 1500p now.

The bus leaves around 930am out the front of the hotel and take you to Batangas pier. They supply a like "tour leader" to get you through the maze of people and alleys to the terminus. You need to be very careful here as it's full of "Yahoos and con men" and also some very good pickpockets. Be warned.

The tour leader will supply you with a ticket and a terminal fee docket; retain these as they are super anal about dockets in the Philippines. From memory the boat leaves around 1pm arrive in "Balatero" around 230pm.

At the terminal the food is simple, cheap and not healthy but it's there. It hasn't made me sick yet!

The boat goes past Sabang and past Puerto Galeria to a terminal called Balatero, here you will get the joy of another terminal fee 100p and show your Puerto Galeria QR code on your phone. From here you get a Trike or Baja to Sabang at 300p good for 2. It will take you another 30mins to get to Sabang but it's a beautiful trip looking at the water ways.

There is a faster way to Sabang but at a far great cost, it works best with a group of around 8 people to share the cost. Basically you hire a private bus to drive you to a private speed boat directly to Sabang. The bus will cost between 4000p and 6000p and the speed boat 10,000p. If you're interested, call me and I'll help to get it done via the Dive shop.

The last way is so complicated it's not worth mentioning it.

Accommodation in Sabang

There is no end of places to stay, this place caters for all budgets, but I like the "pinoy" Philippine experience. I never stay in the nice places as I always stay in the pinoy end of Sabang. It can be reached by walking toward the ocean and turning right at the concrete promenade.

Here are my best cheap places to stay in Sabang. All have hot showers and aircon most have kitchens.

1/ At-cans Inn, email: atcinn_sabang83@yahoo.com. Mob; 0916 563 9868 or 0927459 4312.

The lovely Miss Lorna runs this place. The catch there is only 2 good rooms are suitable for long stays, ROOMS 9a and 9b. They are at the back with no views but are comfy. At 1400 to 1800p per night.

2/ Ocean Dream lodge, most rooms are bright and ok, 2 are not, as good, as they are the older ones in the middle.

I like room 16, it's the largest room. It has also advantage to being next to the dive shop, but as always in the Philippines a catch, it's known for stealing. Lock your stuff up well. Rooms are around 1800p hi season to 1400p low season per night. Email; oceandreamlodge@gmail.com, Mob +639662630467

3/ Seashore Beach Resort. It's the best overall, it has a pool and the better rooms are smallish but good, clean and safe. These are around 2000p/ night.

Email: seashore_lodge@yahoo.com Mob +639287058369 or +639275935342.

The Dive Shop

The only true Pinoy dive shop there is "Tina's" all employees are related and it has a casual warm relaxed feeling. If you like high end diving, this place is not for you. The boats are at best ok and entry into the boats at low tide can be a challenge but the diving is 1000p/ per dive. The tanks are 80 alloy and the fills are 200 bar but once they realise you can dive your let to do your own thing.

Rafael is the owner and is super laid back guy, the dive masters vary but in general are good, my choice is Edwin or Mik Mik both are casual easy going guys. Edwin is their dive instructor. Email; Tinasreefdivers1@gmail.com or contact Rafael via WhatsApp +639063769033

Edwin and I often do the Canyons as a fun dive together in ridiculous currents he always knows the best route to take and makes the dive last longest.

The Best Dives

1/ Verdi Island, on its day one of the world's best dives, be aware the currents there can be heavy duty. Do not take them likely, it has brought many a diver unstuck. Currently the fees are killing this pace but it must be done. 2 dives with a BBQ lunch around 4,500 to 6000p

2/ The Canyons, this is the ultimate hi speed drift dive, not for the weaker diver, huge schools of large fish feeding in the current, bring a reef hook to enjoy the experience. At the

conclusion of the dive is the "Anchor", on release be prepared to be dragged down 10 meters or so, the current there drags you down and there is nothing you can do about it.

The more adventurous diver do sea horse rock, it is a decompression dive.

3/ The Alma Jane, is a small ship with great things to see, frog fish, bat fish etc, 28 to 31 meters. I like to do a lap of the wreck then swim toward the shore. There are many reefs to explore and a few more boats and stuff there in the bay. Keep your eyes out for turtles among other stuff. Take a SMB as there are boats going everywhere above; do not surface without deploying it.

4/ Any of the reef dives are good but for me I would do the canyons every day.

In Conclusion

The best time to be there is January to June and typhoon season is between July and December; a typhoon shuts the whole place down for days. The biggest come at the end of the year.

Don't forget to apply for the "Etravel QR pass" before leaving Australia and your Puerto Galeria QR pass also.

Etravel is obtained 2 days prior to leaving, get a print of it along with a copy of your

vaccination from Australian Government. Some places don't allow you to enter without showing your vaccination certificate. Bring a paper copy; they seem to like it best for some reason.

The only ATM to use is in Muelle "Puerto Galeria", PNP bank. Just get a trike there and make a day of it after a dive and explore the area, the Italian restaurant does good food.

Places to eat in Sabang: "Relax", in a small alley way. "Theo's" restaurant, down another alley way, the "Garage" for curries plus any number of Korean places.

Other stuff to do is White beach, the "waterfall by scooter", "zip line", "the pistol" range just to name a few.

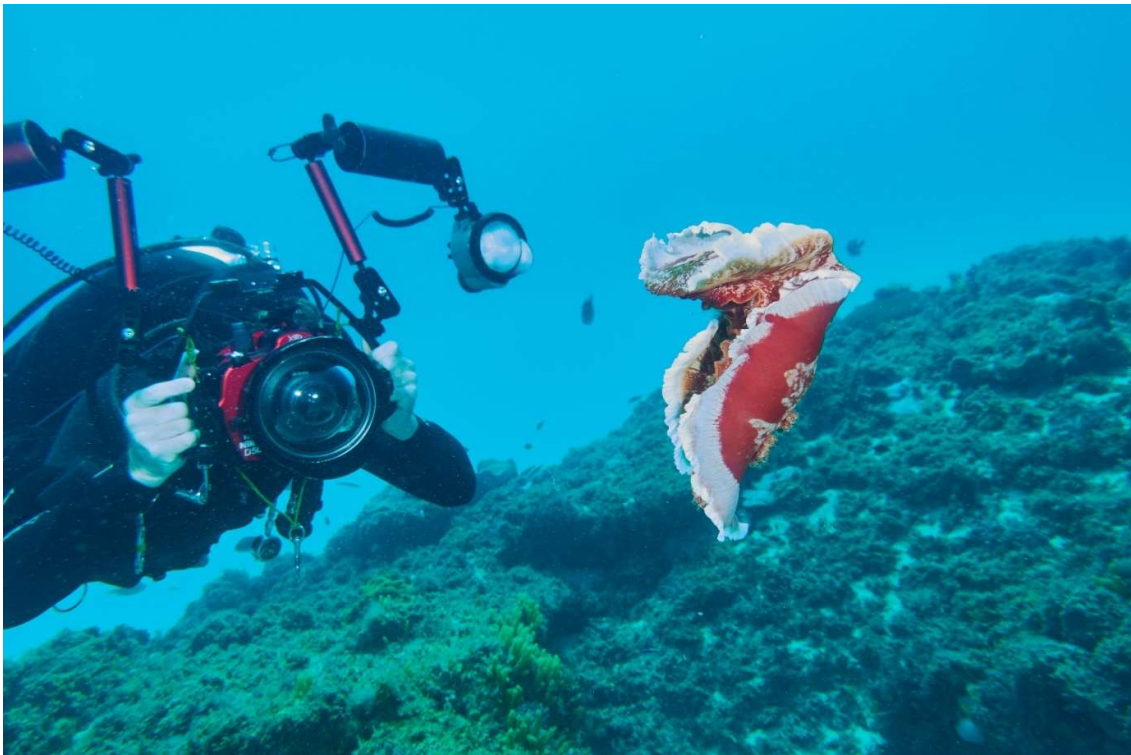
Cheers Dick.

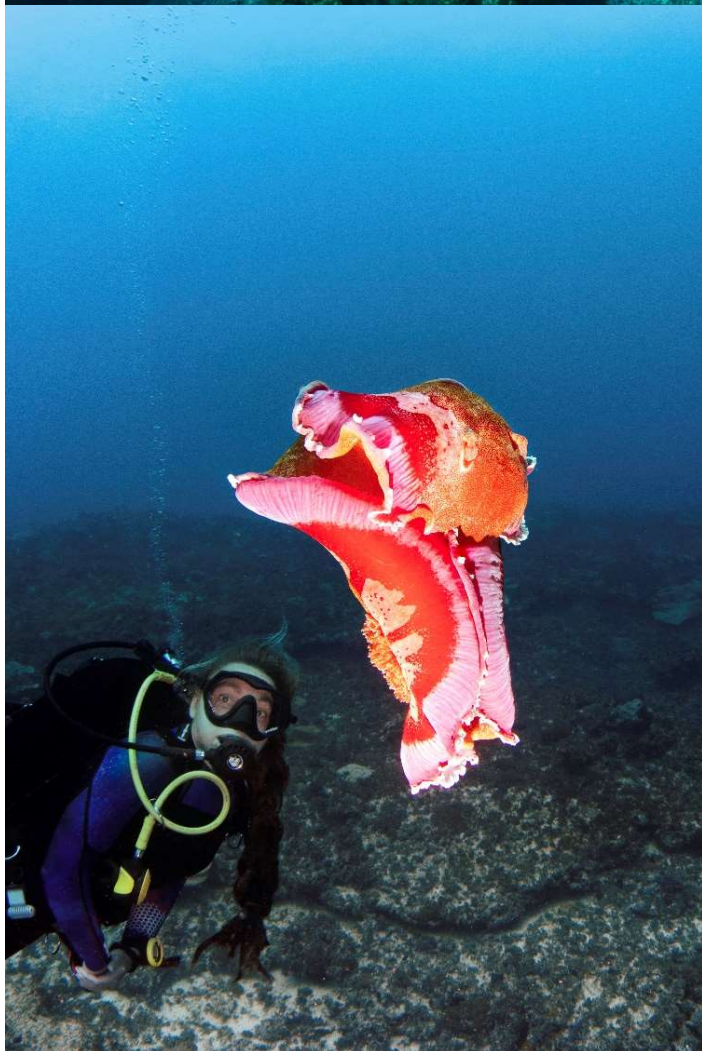
Oh, at the time of writing this there has been an oil tanker sink in the Verdi channel, this could affect the area immensely.

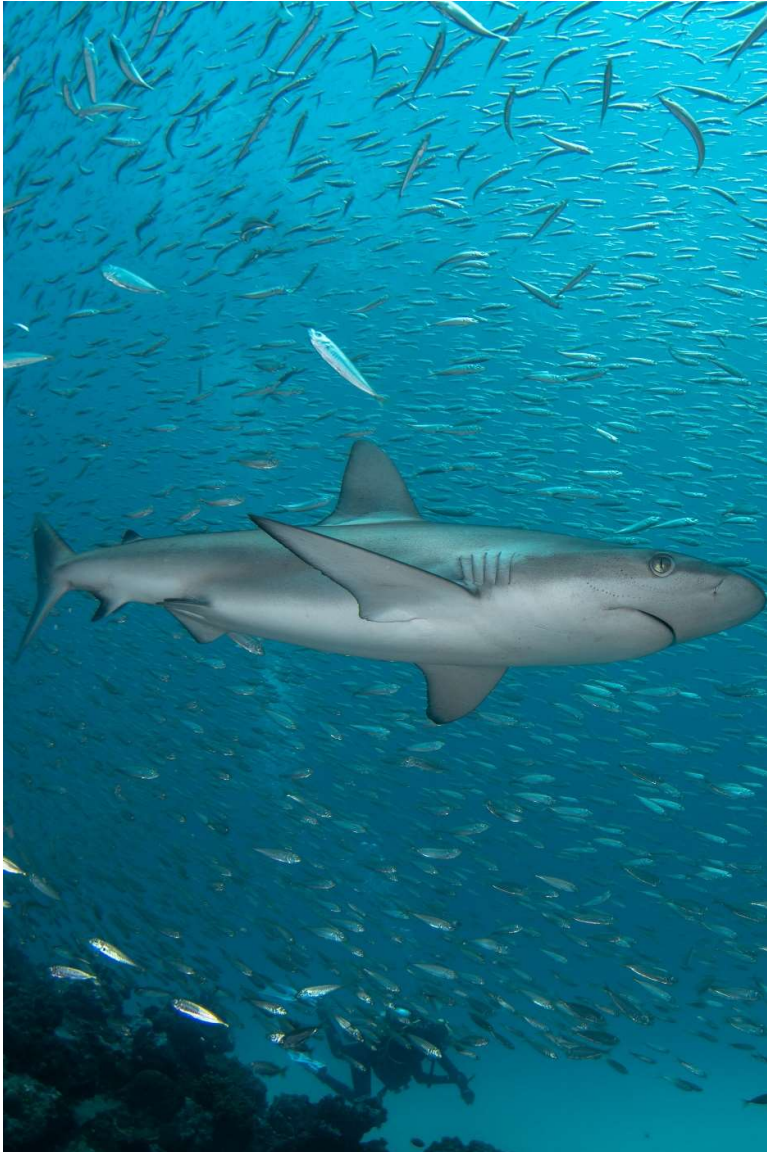
Lord Howe Island

Phil Short

Mary and I visited Lord Howe Island earlier in the year. There have been a few newsletter articles in recent times so I won't repeat what others have said about the island. A few photos from the trip.







Rowley Shoals Western Australia

Text and Photos Chris Ross

Travelled to Rowley Shoals a remote dive site located 300km off-shore from Broome in Western Australia. Rowley shoals are three seamounts in deep water on the edge of the continental shelf, our trip visited Clerke Reef and Mermaid Reef. Clerke reef has an island, Bedwell Island which is permanently above high water mark and so is part of the state of WA, while Mermaid Reef has no point permanently above high water mark and so it is in Commonwealth waters. You can only visit during Late Sept to early December each year as that is the only time when conditions are suitable. When we went there were persistent westerlies, mostly fairly light but strong enough to create some surface chop on one day. The trip out we were heading into the wind so the boat was rolling quite a bit at times. Coming back there was a very light tail wind and not much swell so it was pretty smooth. The trip from Broome took about 20 hours. We left mid morning and arrived early the next day.

The dives apart from the checkout dive when we first arrived and a night dive are all outside the atoll lagoon and are generally drift dives with currents ranging from mild to ripping on one dive. Tidal range at the Shoals is up to 5m, we had up to 3.5m tidal movement on the days we were there, it was full moon the day we left and last quarter (with associated neap tides) on the day we came back. The dive sites were all on the eastern sides of the atoll due to prevailing westerlies, We could see swell breaking on the reef on the other side of the atoll about 4-5km away probably about 1m of swell coming in from the Indian ocean. The East side of the atolls were only impacted by wind chop and that was quite minor, by the time we got to Mermaid Reef the winds had dropped significantly and were getting close to a glass out.

I went out on the Odyssey, which carries 20 people in 10 cabins, there were no ensuites and they had 4 bathroom/showers opening onto the dive deck. my cabin was basic but comfortable. Food was good and plentiful, all food and non alcoholic drinks were included, they kept a bar tab and prices for alcohol were quite reasonable. Crew were a fun group and generally very helpful. There was no camera table so I worked on my housing on the al-fresco deck at one of the tables, which while not ideal worked out OK, they provided an air gun hooked up to a dive bottle on the dive deck to blow off the housing before opening it up. I was the only person with a full rig there, others either had no camera or a TG-6 or a go-pro, i bought my own cooler bag and kept the housing in there between dives and soaked it in the there as well each day. Passed the camera in the cooler across to the tender each dive. Crew were very careful with it and notably always grabbed it via the lanyard handle I had.

There was a DM on board, but not really any guiding as such, it was generally - this is the site topography - the current should be running this way - but if it's not just go with the flow and pop up your SMB and you get picked up. The thing to realise is that all the boats that go out to the site spend the rest of the year as tour boats doing trips up and down the remote Kimberley coast during winter and heading south to work out of Perth during the cyclone season. It's basically a 2 month diving season.

We did 20 dives in total, including one night dive in the lagoon, twelve at Clerke reef and eight at Mermaid Reef. Dives were restricted to 50 minutes or 50 bar and a maximum of 30m, the site is a long way from anywhere and realistically if you get into trouble it is at least 6 hours before you are back on land and even then it's a 2 1/2 hour flight to a chamber should you need one. We

also did a drift snorkel from the lagoon out to open water one afternoon, through 3 different channels. There were 3-4 dives each day, at Clerke reef a tender was used to get to each site while the boat remained moored, it could comfortably take 20 people out to the site, though in the chop you did get plenty of spray. The tender is left at Clerke reef for the duration of the season and at Mermaid reef we dived from the main boat and they had a tinnie in the water to assist divers as they came up if required, but generally the boat came and picked us up. Luckily my assigned dive buddy and the other people who we fell into diving with were all very competent divers, all pretty good on air and didn't just swim off. As the only photographer on the trip I didn't have a lot of time to work subjects so needed to lineup shots quickly, planning ahead to get the shots. The last day had three dives and we were out of the water by 1:00pm allowing a full 24 hours before anyone flew out.

The diving was all very good, visibility so far from land was excellent but a little variable - in the mornings it seemed best with the sun behind us and was mostly 30-40m. A couple of dives up at Mermaid reef had over 40m of visibility - guesstimated 50m. Corals and sea fans were in great condition and plenty of reef fish. The sites were mostly walls or slopes dropping off to between 20 and 50m at the sand. Mermaid wall was a stunning divesite the water below the wall is 400m deep and we dived there was a ripping current, we covered 1.2km in a 45 min dive and you need to pay close attention to your depth. Other sites went into the various valleys and crevices and caves in the reef wall. We also did a drift in through the mermaid reef channel, quite a ride with a lot of fish and sharks to see, then explored the multiple small bommies where the current drops away.

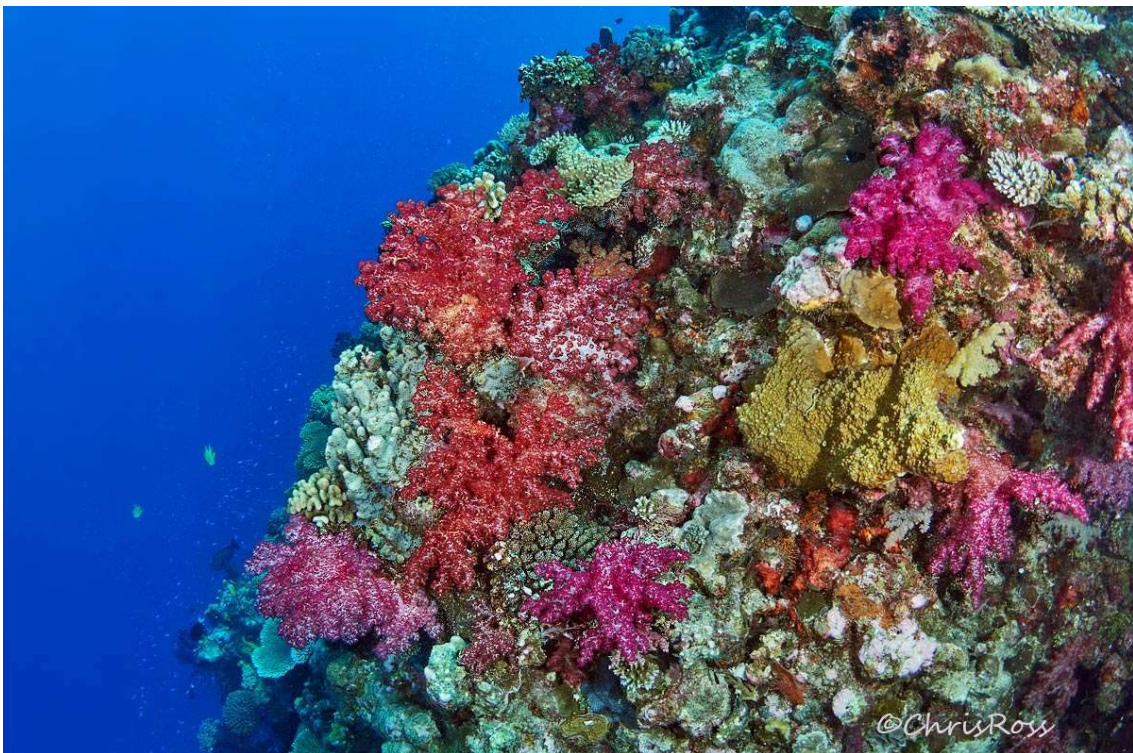
Water temperature was 26-27°C, I dived in skins - frogskin bottoms and a 1.5mm neoprene top and added a enth degree vest to cut wind chill a little.

Out in the blue anything is possible in such a location though admittedly I didn't see a lot, we had a hammerhead do a pass and a quick u-turn just as we were descending on mermaid wall, saw some large pelagics from a distance, one dive there was a group of 20-30 reef sharks we spotted from about 30m away and we saw various sharks swim by but they were generally shy. A couple of 1-1.5m humphead wrasse that I managed to get about 3m from and quite big schools of bumphead parrotfish, up to about 50 strong like big schools of buffalo grazing on the coral, again a little difficult to get super close, particularly shooting with a fisheye. From the boat dolphins often came for a bow ride particularly in the morning and we had a big school of spinner dolphins one morning. On the way up to Mermaid wall, we saw a Marlin leaping out of the water repeatedly, looked to be about 2m long. At our mooring in Clerke lagoon, a lot of fish including some reef sharks hung out under our boat.

The other factor was the isolation out in the ocean, we were often the only boat around, we had a couple of other trip boats in the lagoon on a couple of day, a fisheries boat called in briefly and there was a yacht there for a couple of days. Quite relaxing be out there cut off from the outside world. You could buy a satellite internet package - but that kind of defeats the purpose of getting away from it all.

Photographically it was all wide angle stuff, I used a fisheye, though I could definitely see a benefit to having some zoom capability, something like a WWL or for my m43 setup an adapted 8-15 fisheye. I used my 12-40 on the first day and then switched for the rest of the dives to the 8mm Panasonic fisheye. If anyone wanted to do this trip I would recommend taking along a buddy who will also be photographing and is unlikely to disappear on you!

Who says you can't do split shots with a 100mm dome? 😄 Our boat The Odyssey in near glass out conditions:







Upcoming Calendar Events

June 2023

Saturday, 17 June 2023 Boat Dive Wedding Cake Island Sylvania/Port Botany
Bob Hill 0490 411 105 rrahill1@optusnet.com.au

Sunday, 25 June 2023 Friday, 30 June 2023 Week Away North Solitary Island Wooli
Michael McFadyen 0407 276 556 michael@michaelmcfadyscuba.info

July 2023

Saturday, 1 July 2023 Boat Dive Bypass Reef Sylvania/Port Botany
Greg Blackburne 0419 977 390 blackburnegnb@gmail.com

Saturday, 15 July 2023 Boat Dive Marley Point Yowie Bay/RMYC Shelley Breuseker 0438 998 199
seashellsb01@gmail.com

Saturday, 22 July 2023 Deep Wreck Dive Long Reef Wreck Rose Bay
Ian Roffey 0418 208 125 ianroffey@gmail.com

August 2023

Saturday, 5 August 2023 Boat Dive The Colours Rose Bay
Craig Spillane 0413 753 223 dreamwavefishndive@gmail.com

Friday, 11 August 2023 Sunday, 13 August 2023 Deep Diving Weekend Jervis Bay Huskisson
Ian Roffey 0418 208 125 ianroffey@gmail.com

Saturday, 12 August 2023 Boat Dive The Balcony Yowie Bay/RMYC
Shelley Breuseker 0438 998 199 seashellsb01@gmail.com

Saturday, 26 August 2023 Boat Dive Middle Ground Yowie Bay/RMYC Greg Blackburne 0419 977 390
blackburnegnb@gmail.com