



SEA BRAGGIN'

St George Scuba Club Newsletter

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TIMOR LESTE

19 August 2013 - 31 August 2013

Club members were: Ken and Shalene Ridley, John and Maureen Prior, Ian Hittman, Steve Boyd, Dave Casburn, Eddie Ivers and Paul Pacey

A short history of Timor Leste (East Timor)

Until WWII East Timor was a colonial outpost of Portugal established in the 16th century. West Timor was originally a colonial outpost of the Netherlands – which is, I guess, why the island is split down the middle. West Timor is now a part of Indonesia. During WWII East Timor was occupied by the Japanese military. After WWII ended East Timor was returned to Portuguese control and this arrangement remained in place until Portugal had a political revolution in 1974. As a result of the troubles in Portugal, East Timor became a forgotten land and the East Timorese began agitating for sovereignty. The US and Australian governments were worried that the control of the country would fall into the hands of a communist regime (oh, and East Timor has oil reserves).

When the Indonesians floated the idea of invading the country the US and Australian governments gave their approval – even though the UN was totally opposed to an Indonesian invasion. The Americans evidently forbade the Indonesians from using any US supplied military hardware during the invasion. On 7 November 1975 the Indonesians invaded East Timor using US supplied military hardware and weapons. And so began 24 years of oppression by the Indonesian military and, worse still, the militia units that were imported from Indonesia and then trained and supervised by the Indonesian military in East Timor.

The Timorese people ran a guerrilla war against the invaders and these Falintil guerrillas were actively hunted and killed by the





Indonesian troops and their militia units – it is said that well over 100,000 Timorese people died as a result. The UN, prodded along by Portugal and a lot of other countries that were probably feeling guilty, eventually forced the Indonesians to allow the East Timorese to have a referendum on whether they wanted to have total independence or continue to be administered by Indonesia. Strangely enough, after being persecuted for 24 years, on 30 August 1999 they voted overwhelmingly for independence. When the referendum results were released, the Indonesian military and their militia forces went on a rampage to punish the Timorese people for the results. Many Timorese people just “disappeared”, others were shot for no reason, and many buildings and much infrastructure were destroyed. Much of this damage is still visible as you walk around Dili to this day.

The repair work is progressing but they have a long way to go. The turmoil caused by the referendum continued until a UN authorised peace keeping force lead by the Australian Military landed in the country on 10 September 1999. However, Timor Leste did not become formally an independent nation until 20 May 2002, when Xanana Gusmao was elected president of Timor Leste.

In spite of all their hardship and past suffering and being let down by so many other people in this world the Timorese are just the most delightful people to meet. They are so forgiving and their peaceful nature hides what they have been through.

The country of Timor Leste is one hour’s flight time to the north-west of Darwin across the Timor Sea. The island is very mountainous (some mountains are around 3000 metres high) and most of the approximately 1 million population live on the northern coastline. This is a good thing for divers, because on the southern coastline they have crocodiles but not on the northern coastline (or so we were assured). The capital is Dili and the second largest town is Bacau which is also on the northern coastline to the east of Dili.



There is a wet and a dry season and we were lucky to have visited during the dry season. From the size of the rivers we saw, the wet season would mean very poor visibility for diving, as most of the diving is right on the edge of the coastal strip. The main river in Dili is the Comorro River and it’s about 150 metres wide. During the dry season there is not a single drop of water visible in the river. In fact, the locals use it as sand and gravel quarry! But when the wet season arrives, well... that river bed ain’t 150 metres wide by accident!

Our trip to Timor Leste started by all meeting in Darwin for the 60 minute flight to Dili. Some of the crew went to Darwin a few days early to have a look around or, in the case of Ken and Shalene Ridley, to indulge the grandchildren who live in Darwin.

When our plane landed in Dili we thought that the Timorese were extremely pleased that St George SCUBA Club had finally arrived as there was a very large welcoming party with well dressed people and security types ready to greet us. But when we got off the plane we were ignored and directed to the tradesman’s entrance. It turned out that Kirsty Sword-Gusmao was also on our flight.

For those who don’t know about Kirsty Sword-Gusmao, she is an Australian who risked her life aiding the Timorese in their long struggle for independence against the Indonesians. Apart from thousands of Timorese, the Indonesians also murdered 7 foreign (the Balibo 5 plus two others) journalists to stop them making public the atrocities they were committing against the Timorese people. She is a



freedom fighter, First Lady and much loved mother to the Timorese people and she continues to devote her life to them. She eventually married Xanana Gusmao. She is a truly inspirational lady, a sort of Australian “White Mouse” (Nancy Wake), with an ongoing devotion to them. One of those people you would put on your bucket list of people to meet. You can find information about her on the net and documentary “Alias Ruby Blade” which was her ASIO code name.

The trip

Now that we have set the scene, let’s get on with the trip report...

We had no problems getting through Timor immigration and customs. In fact, John and Maureen went through customs twice because, after they arrived OUTSIDE the terminal, someone asked them why they hadn’t collected their baggage - D’OH. They merely walked back into the terminal, past all the “security”, grabbed their bags and walked back out again. Luke and Simone from Dive Timor Lorosae (DTL) were there to greet us and drive us back to our accommodation.

The dive operation at DTL is a great setup. They have a dive shop at the front of the property with equipment rental and gear washing facilities and a hanging space for your dive gear to dry overnight. The accommodation is at the rear of the property and, whilst not exactly 5 star, it was more than comfortable with large rooms, plenty of storage, air conditioning, tables and chairs outside and more wash tubs for cameras and stuff. Above the dive shop is a bar and restaurant called Castaways. The property is across the road from the Dili beachfront and sitting in the Castaway bar looking out across the strait to Atauro Island was a pretty nice way to end a really tough day of diving (tough diving? – as if!).

After stowing our gear, Luke introduced us to the dive team (Simone, Stephanie, Alice) and our boat skipper Dana. We would also be diving with their DM’s in training Leo and Chris). We also met with Volker, who is one of the owners of DTL and also lives on the property. The first thing that strikes you is that Simone, Stephanie, Alice, Dana, Luke, and Volker are all dive instructors! The second thing is that this is like the United Nations of diving, with Simone coming from Brazil, Stephanie from France, Alice from the UK, Dana is Australian (well, she comes from Hobart), Luke from the US, Volker from Germany, Leo from Canada and Chris from Finland. Additionally, there are many locals employed and they looked after us so well. I’m not really sure how many Timorese staff DTL employ but it seemed like dozens as they moved around so quickly and always have a huge smile on their face. Make no mistake about it, DTL is a very professional dive operation that knows what is expected from a dive operator and, better still, they know how to deliver it to their own customers. I would have no hesitation in recommending them to anyone contemplating a dive trip to enjoy the world class diving to be experienced in Timor Leste.

The next thing that we were told to do was join all the DTL staff for drinks in the Castaway bar – what a perfect start to our trip.





The plan for a day's diving here is as simple as ABCD...

- A) 5:30am - Mullah at the mosque behind the dive shop starts calling to us. Roll over and go back to sleep for another hour – also ignoring roosters doing their thing.
- B) 6:30am - Get out of bed and go for a walk around Dili.
- C) 7:30am - Back to Castaway for a sumptuous breakfast
- D) 9:00am Go diving

Tuesday 20 August - Pertamina Pier and then Tasi Tulo

Like most of the diving in Timor Leste, these are shore dives. The Timorese are much smarter than Australians. The Timorese put most of their coral reefs just a few metres from the shore unlike the silly 4 hour boat ride we have endure to visit the Great Barrier Reef in Australia!

Pertamina Pier is a short distance from the dive shop at the western end of the main Dili beach. It's where the oil tankers bring in fuel for Dili. The pier is, I guess, about 400 metres long and is a macro dive. It's pretty shallow so we did a 90 minute dive. This was a good start for our diving with many critters found amongst the rubble under the pier. The visibility wasn't great at around 8 metres but the water was a beautiful 28C!!! Eddie, Ian and I didn't even make it to the end of the pier as we just ran out of time because there was so much to see – a good dive and the best was yet to come.

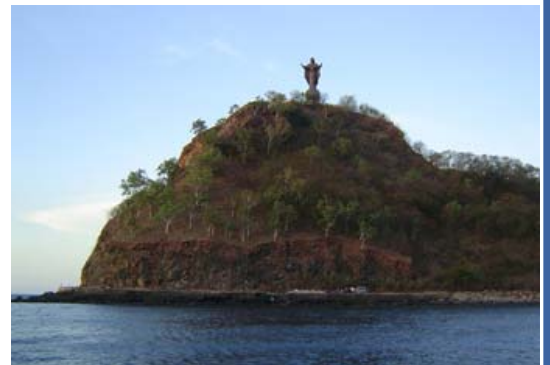
Some of the critters spotted were: Mantis shrimp, large Sweetlips, Octopus, shrimp Goby's and various nudibranch's including Fine-lined Tambja's.

After a nice lunch back at the dive shop we hopped in the van again and headed further west along the coast to our next dive site called Tasi Tulo.

After gearing up we merely walked across the beach, jumped in the water and descended a sandy slope that went down to about 30 metres. The slope is dotted with reef sections intermingled with sandy/weedy patches. Visibility was easily 20 metres. Much time was spent hunting for the elusive angler fish, pipe fish and ghost pipe fish that this site is known for. Another 90 minute dive.

After returning to the dive shop Stephanie and Simone suggested a trip to Cristo Rei which is an impressive statue of Jesus which stands 27 metres tall and is located at the eastern end of the Dili outskirts. The statue is high on a peninsula and it is a fairly strenuous climb from the car park up to the statue. The views along the way are stunning. Looking to the west we can see beautiful reefs along to shore line as far as the eye can see. Some of us are now drooling...

After visiting Cristo Rei the girls suggest a stop off at the Caz Bar (no, it's nothing to do with Dave Casburn) – a watering hole at a very pretty little beach on the way back to town. They have chairs and tables on the beach and you can sit under the trees and watch the sun go down as you also watch the Bintang's go down. This is not a shabby way to spend your evening! Thanks Simone and Stephanie. We could get to really like the Caz Bar...





Tonight we decided to eat next door to the dive shop at the Dili Beach Hotel. They have a similar layout to the Castaway bar, with a large semi-open upstairs area which is a combined bar and restaurant. The outlook over the bay is again stunningly beautiful. The menu is similar to Castaway but with enough difference that it's nice to bounce between the two every couple of nights for a change. As with Castaway, the food at the Dili Beach Hotel is excellent and cheap.

I have to tell you, the mosquitoes up here are huge. Someone saw three of the buggers flying in formation and assured us that they had "Boeing" written on them. They don't land on you – they crash into you. BUT, they are so slow that you don't need to swat them, you just squash them with your finger as they make no attempt to fly away. Luckily, they are not a problem in the rooms as long as you keep the doors shut.

Wednesday 21 August – K41 and the Secret Garden

After the usual morning routine we hop into the vans and this time head east to explore the coast on the other side of Dili.

Some people have noticed the propensity for Steve to always occupy the front passenger seat of the van or truck when we're travelling – earning him the nickname "Super Glue". Uh Oh, it's only day 2 and the nicknames have already started...

Our first dive site is known as K41 as it's a 41km drive east of Dili. Again, the procedure is simple. Park the cars under some shady trees, gear up and hit the water. What an absolute cracker of a dive site this is. Just after entering the water you follow a wall down and to the east. The wall is absolutely stunning in colour and covered in critters. Cripes, we hadn't gone 10 metres when Simone spots a Leaf Fish. The visibility here is easily 30 metres. The next thing to notice is that the wall has heaps of Tiger Anemone's – these are really pretty and much photographed. The gorgonians are spectacular. As we headed further around the wall, which drops in a series of ledges down to about 30 metres, we suddenly hit a strong current. No worries, just turn around and find heaps more stuff on the way back. Just before we exit Simone points out a ghost pipe fish. This is a fantastic dive site and is very relaxing as you visually sift through the decoration looking for that unusual critter or three – if only I could see properly! We also notice that there seems to be a muck dive to the western side of the entry – another day perhaps.

Critters sighted were: Leaf Fish, Fine-lined Tambja's, Ghost pipe fish, various other flavours of Nudibranch, Flatworms.

The second site is not far away and is called The Secret Garden. Another awesome dive site. The entry is a bit more difficult as you have to snorkel about 50 metres (well, it seemed like 50 metres) across a shallow reef to get to the wall drop off. Once you get there though it's immediately apparent that the swim was worth it. Another colourful garden to spend 90 minutes searching around in. Very nice, especially with 30 metres visibility.

Ken has now become known as "Tiddles" after we notice that Shalene has sewn little pussy cats onto his swimmers.

Paul has become known as "Teflon" as any intending buddies encountered during a dive always seem to slip off before the end of the dive.

Thursday 22 August – Dirt Track and Lone Tree

Today, we head east of Dili again with the first dive site being Dirt Track – because the access is down a dirt....

Another beautiful reef with easy access and over 30 metres visibility. Did I tell you that the water is 28C? Maureen and Shalene came along with us today as the reef is easy to access for snorkelling. We encountered a slight current at the extremities of the dive site.

Critters found: More Fine-lined Tambja's, Porcelain Crabs, Anemone Fish.

After another delicious bento box lunch we headed to our second dive site called Lone Tree. Unfortunately, the lone tree died quite a long time ago and this meant that when they weren't snorkelling, the girls had to sit in the van



for shade whilst we dived. This is another very pretty dive site and again we had 30 metres visibility. The site has an interesting slope that runs down to a wall that then drops to well over 40 metres depth. The best part of the dive, I think, was along the wall in 10m to 20m. There were large anemone gardens and also Tiger Anemones with huge schools of small colourful fish just waiting for you to get those postcard photos's so you can annoy all the people in the office when you get home. There were also a lot of garden eels on the slope near the entry. Far too much to take in during one dive according to one of our divers.

Critters found: Porcelain Crabs, Fine-lined Tambja's, Moray eels, Anemone Fish, Garden eels, Lionfish.

At breakfast today we saw two guys ride past on a motor scooter. The guy on the back had a kitchen table crossway on the seat in front of him. This would have been OK except that the driver was weaving in and out of traffic whilst the guy on the back was in charge of stopping the table from hitting the cars – after all, this would have damaged the table.

We've also noticed the traffic rules in Dili – there are none as long as you blow your horn all the time.

The scene: At the Dili car registration mechanical inspection station...

Inspector: Sound your horn

Driver: Beep, Beep

Inspector: Your car is mechanically perfect, have a nice day.

Friday 23 August – Dili Rock East and Dili Rock West

Today we travelled to the west of Dili to our first dive site called Dili Rock East. This dive site is not far from Dili but is another excellent dive site. It's basically a rocky headland and has an interesting underwater topography. The dive site has an easy entry (once you've crossed the slippery rock shelf), the visibility was over 20 metres and no current. A smorgasbord of critters at this sight. We had only gone a short distance and had already found a couple of Fine-lined Tambja's, some huge batfish, a herd of flutemouths swam past, a Mosaic Moray eel, prowling Lionfish, heaps of Anemones – some with glass shrimp, large Phyllidia's of various types, schools of Blue Runners and pretty coral gardens. Yes, not a bad dive site! We also found a blue-ringed octopus which got Simone really excited – they are a much treasured find up here.

When we exited we discovered that the wind had come up and was blowing at 15 knots on-shore. Until now we had not had any wind at all and the real problem was that tomorrow we had planned to take the boat over to Atauro Island which is 20 km away. This was not looking good for tomorrow.

Our second dive was at Dili Rock West which is, you guessed, on the other side of the headland from our first dive today. This is also a nice dive site but I personally think that Dili Rock East has more critters. Whilst we were under water the wind had increased in strength and we were able to body surf back into the beach for the exit. This was actually quite a fun thing to do (unless you were juggling a camera)!

Tonight for dinner some of us decided to wander down the beach to another hotel called The Esplanada. It has nice accommodation downstairs with a beautifully landscaped pool area. Upstairs it has a semi open restaurant and bar area similar to Castaway. After perusing the Esplanada restaurant menu, John and Maureen decided to go to the Nautilus restaurant a couple of doors down which is well known for its seafood. Those of us still at Esplanada actually ordered seafood which was delicious. John and Maureen actually had chicken and a steak. No, I haven't worked this out either.

Walking around the back streets on our morning walks is interesting. Some of the housing is quite nice whilst adjacent streets are shanty town. Nonetheless, despite their obvious poverty, the locals are up early and sweeping up around their houses and they always give a smile and an “elo” or a “buon dia” as we pass. Even the stray dogs smile at you. Some of the kids practice their English with a “G'day mate” as we pass.



Saturday 24 August – The Pinnacle and “the back side of Christ”

Well, today we had planned to go to Atauro Island which many of us had really been looking forward to as we'd heard quite a lot of good reports about the diving there. But the weather was not being kind to us but it was good enough to go out on the boat as long as we stayed close to Dili. So we hopped on the boat and headed to a dive site called 'The Pinnacle'. On the way we were quite amused by the way the boat zig-zagged the whole way and some people were asking Dana what she had for breakfast (vodka, gin...). But the problem was that the steering wheel has only a tenuous connection to the rudder, resulting in lots of steering by Dana but not a lot of response by the boat. Dana is new to DTL and thus also new to the boat and she handled our heckling in good humour. Dana is an amazing lady as we'll discover later.

Dili harbour is not a harbour as we would imagine, it's really a section of coastline that's protected from the open ocean by Atauro Island to the north and a myriad of local reefs. The Pinnacle is one of these reefs. As there may be strong currents, they don't anchor on The Pinnacle, it's done as a drift dive – SMB's are essential so the boat can find you wherever you surface.

In we go.... Hey, 15 metres visibility and Dana has dropped us right on top of 'The Pinnacle' – excellent. The Pinnacle is quite large (maybe 200 metres by 100 metres) and from 14 metres deep on top it falls away on all sides to over 40 metres. The current is slight and, as instructed, we set off to the north eastern end where it drops away more steeply so we'd have a better chance of seeing some large pelagics and sharks. I only saw one small reef shark but I seem to remember someone else seeing a larger shark. There were some small barracuda at one point. The bottom has quite a lot of bommies which makes for good critter hunting and we also found a few blind sharks. Even Dave said that “there were a lot of nudi's”.

For our second dive we headed around to a beach which is on the eastern side of Christo Rei. This area is known as “the back side of Christ”. I am not making this up! This site is normally done as a shore dive as the reef is close to the beach. I'm sure glad we did this as a boat dive – keep reading.

By now the wind is howling and Dana is making a super human effort with the helm to get the boat to where we need to be to make our entry. After we hit the water we found the visibility to be at least 20 metres and there was a slight current heading to the west, which is the prevailing current up here. This is another great dive site, very pretty and with lots of things to look at including some file fish. At first the current carried us along gently but after a while it started arcing up! Before long we're really hooting along. If we had been shore diving we would have made our way towards the shore for a safe exit on the beach. But we're boat diving so we just “go with the flow” however, if you saw something interesting, it was gone in a flash. Eventually we surfaced and I thought “cripes, we're a bit close to the rocks for a boat pickup” but I didn't have to worry as, by the time the boat got to us, we'd been swept around the point and were heading to the Caz Bar – which would have been a neat place to wait for the boat!

Tonight for dinner, Simone and Stephanie took us down to an area where there are quite a few beachfront seafood restaurants. We went to L'Aubergine which had been recommended to Simone by friends. The food was excellent. The special of the day was swordfish which most of us ordered and it was cooked perfectly (it's tricky to cook swordfish as it dries out really easily). It was a great night out – many thanks to Simone and Stephanie for taking us.

Sunday 25 August – K57 and One Tree

Today we head west again to a site known as K57. This is a really nice dive site with an easy entry as you just step off a ledge at the edge of the water and drop into 12 metres of water on a wall. The





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wall has lots of interesting crevices and ledges along the wall. Once again, it's a nudibranch garden with lots of other camouflaged critters as well. Most people stayed in for 90 minutes.

For our second dive we headed back towards Dili and stopped at the dive site known as One Tree, which is on the way. There is actually a large tree growing in the water 10 metres from the shore! This was not a mangrove tree and nobody we spoke to knew what sort of tree it was – it's really weird. The same trees grow along the shoreline. The wind had again blown up quite strongly and the entry and exit were slightly tricky as there was a bit of a surf running and lots of small rocks to negotiate in the shallow water at the entry. Once in the water the site is very similar in structure to K57.

Monday 26 August - Maubara and Bubble Beach

Today we all head to the west of Dili to the village of Maubara for another shore dive. A special attraction at Maubara is the historic fort which we visited and had lunch, more on this later.

The beachfront at Maubara is very pretty and entry for the dive was a doddle although you have to swim a fair way out to the good stuff. After the easy entry, the fun started! There we were cruising around, looking for critters, when along comes Mr Current. So we go with the flow to the west for a while until we realise it's getting stronger and stronger. Okay, plan B, let's go up into the shallows where we know there's no current. Ummm, wrong, instead we find a really strong current but it's going the other way (east). Plan C, go with this flow until we think we're back near the entry. After a while we figure we must be back near the entry. Plan D, let's go back down deeper to catch the



current going back to the west. The problem was that the deeper current was now going east too. We gave up – Plan E, get out of the water. The locals were also scratching their heads as they'd never seen anything like it before either. No drama but it made it hard to appreciate what is a really nice dive site.

Off to the fort. The fort was actually built by the Dutch who grabbed the Maubara area from the Portuguese early in the Portuguese colonisation and then built the fort to make sure that they kept it. The Portuguese negotiated to swap Flores (now in Indonesia) for Maubara thus Maubara and the fort then “belonged” to the Portuguese. I wonder if they asked the Timorese people if this was all OK with them. The fort is really interesting to walk around and the grounds are really pretty and it even has two original cannons mounted on the walls facing to sea. DTL arranged for us to have lunch at the restaurant inside the fort – which was really nice.

Dive 2 was at Bubble Beach on the way back to Dili. It gets its name from gas bubbles that (used to) bubble out of the sand. We didn't find any bubbles. But we did find another pretty section of reef sloping down to about 16 metres. Finding critters at this site seemed to be a bit more difficult than we have gotten used to so far – we have been getting a bit spoilt! But we did find some Nudibranch's that we haven't seen before. Eddie also found a pair of cute commensal shrimp living on a large sea whip and got some good photos. This was not easy as the shrimp were tiny and the sea whip kept moving in the breeze. I was chuffed to find a small stick pipefish.

Tuesday 27 August - K41 (twice!)

Today we went back to K41 and everyone was excited to go back as this site was looking to get the majority vote as the top dive shore site near Dili.



It was a bit overcast when we arrived at the site and it actually sprinkled rain for a few minutes during our second dive. This was the only time it rained during our trip.

A very relaxing dive, this time covering the same site but in much more detail. Simone found two winged pipe fish. I don't think any of us had seen this type of pipe fish before. Their camouflage was truly amazing and they looked exactly like the weed that they were living on. If they didn't move you would be really lucky to find them.

After another bento box lunch we decided that the first dive was so good we decided that 90 minutes of K41 was not enough and we would do the same dive again – because we can!

Some of us were also keen to go and have a look around on the sandy slope to the west of the entry. We jumped in and followed Ian down to have a look at a couple of pretty *Notodoris nudibranchs* at around 30 metres. I knew this was going to cost me and, sure enough, after looking at them for a few minutes, I already had a 5 minute decompression penalty. Hmmmm, looks like I will definitely have to poke around in the shallows for a (long) while later. As it turned out, the muck dive at K41 is VERY rewarding with porcelain crabs, many different types of nudibranch, garden eels and file fish spotted.

When we travelled to Timor Leste, Paul just possibly may have had the symptoms of influenza. Eventually, everyone on the trip had caught it including some of the dive crew! Paul's nickname has now changed to "Louie the fly". Errrrr, sorry guys and gurrlls – Paul.

Wednesday 28 August – The Pinnacle

Today we were going on the boat again and the first dive was again to The Pinnacle – no complaints with this plan.

This is what Eddie wrote...

After heading to the north east side of the Pinnacle, Paul soon found a Mantis shrimp to play with. Then he found a "sabre toothed shark" hiding under a rock. It turns out that it was a blind shark and the sabre teeth were actually its barbels. Paul really needs better eyes! We found a few Shrimp Goby's and also found what appeared to be a massive wrasse hiding in a hole. We could not see the whole fish but it must have been 50kg. It was bright green and had colourful patches.

After we got back on the boat we found that Steve had accidentally dropped his \$9,000 camera rig when getting back on the boat. By the time he realised it had come unclipped from his BC it was too late. He went back down but none of us, including Steve, had enough bottom time left to do a proper search for it. This made the choice of the second dive site pretty easy really. We were going to have a long surface interval and then go on a camera hunt.

Back to The Pinnacle we go. During our surface interval, with Simone's help, we had worked out a really great search plan. This plan sounded fine on the boat but, as soon we hit the water, the search plan looked remarkably similar to the usual starburst pattern! Luckily, Paul found the camera in 21 metres sitting upright on the sandy slope – so no scratches on the dome port! After we found the camera, we even found Steve and gave his camera back to him. We also saw a turtle, which seemed quite friendly as it swam around us - I think Steve got some photo's of it with his new camera. We also saw a couple of Nudi's that seemed quite friendly – they were propagating. One other thing we have noticed here is that the sea life is quite skittish as they are obviously not used to divers invading their space so the friendly turtle was a nice find.

Tonight we attended a film night at the Dili cinema. It was a charity viewing to aid the Timorese people. The film documented the events leading up to the vote for independence and the events following the publication of the results. It was a very confronting film.

Thursday 29 August – Atauro Island – Frank's Crack and Table Top

AT LAST – a good weather forecast so we're heading to Atauro Island.

It's about 20km to Atauro Island from Dili harbour – but we did about 30km. Darn that wonky steering. The first dive site was "Frank's Crack" - seriously. I guess that Frank may have been the local plumber. The wall is quite close



to the shore and descends from 5 metres to over 70 metres and is just covered in colourful corals and reef growth. The currents during the dive were a bit fickle but not strong enough to cause us any problems. Despite the brilliant looks of the reef here I found it quite challenging to find those hidden critters. Even the Nudi's were a bit thin on the ground, oops, I mean reef.

Our second dive was to a place called Table Top. I think that this was a much better dive site than our first dive. The site has a varied and interesting topography of crevices, walls, ledges, gutters and some small sloping rubbly sections too. At one stage we found a small cave that had a cloud of small fish swimming around the entrance. Investigation revealed that warm water was flowing out of the cave. It was kind of like being in an underwater spa. This time we found a lot of interesting critters including a Leaf Fish. Ian found a banded sea snake. Unfortunately the snake ducked into a crevice preventing the capture on camera.

It took us about 2 hours each way on the boat, but once Captain Dana fixes the steering I think that they should be able to the trip in 90 minutes - which is quite acceptable to access the quality dive sites that Atauro Island offers.

Friday 30 August

Alas, no diving today as we have to depart tomorrow.

DTL offered us a half day tour but we'd already been to most of the places on the tour agenda either with Stephanie and Simone tourism services inc. or during our walks around town. The one thing that we really wanted to visit was the museum but when we arrived at the museum we found it was closed as this day as it was a public holiday to celebrate the anniversary of the independence ballot. So we went along to the celebrations instead. We didn't really have much of any idea what was going on as our entire Tetum vocabulary was still less than 10 words. But, everyone was smiling, cheering and clapping the speeches so it was all good.

Volker offered to take us out on the boat this afternoon for a sunset cruise and we all happily headed down to the harbour. Once on the boat Dana discovers that the engine won't start

and then disappears down a hatch into the bilge. Most of us don't really care and start drinking beer and enjoying the ambiance – as you do. One and a half Bintangs later the engine roars into life and Dana emerges victorious from the murky confines of the engine room! Where do you find a woman like that? The answer is “Tasmania”.



Summing up by Ken....

Now to try and sum up shore diving in Timor Leste. Stunning, frabjous and an absolute riot of marine life. Everything growing on something that's growing on something that's growing on something. As I have found out when reviewing my pics. The fish are very nervous as they are not used to divers. My stealth skills developed significantly, as well as my solo diving skills. Plenty of pics in the CC and forthcoming Shore dive wraps (Yes this was a shore diving trip). Gruppenfuhrer Pacey also earned a bar to his “Teflon” nickname by consistently giving those pesky would be buddies the slip. Again thanks to Paul for organising and, as always, being an entertaining and great travelling companion. (I better stop now as we all know how humile (is that a word) Paul is.

Many thanks to all those people who contributed text and/or photos for this report.

Paul Pacey



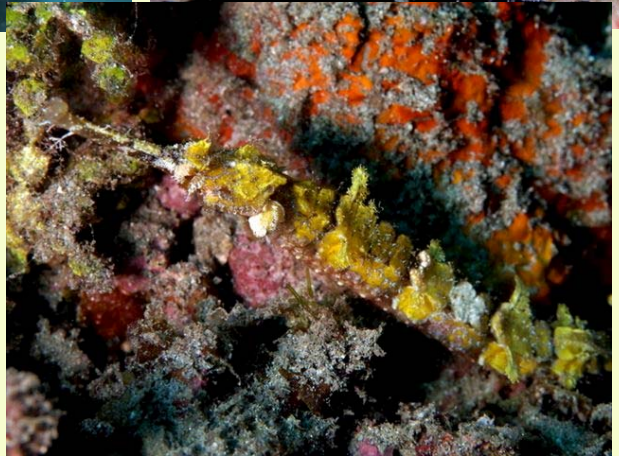
SEA BRAGGIN'

Photos by Ken Ridley



Photos by Eddie Ivers





Photos by David Casburn









St George Scuba Club Christmas Party Sunday 1 December 2013 at Kurnell

All members and their families are invited - **IT'S FREE** and lunch is provided.

Meet 8am or earlier to get a great parking spot. Morning dive will be followed by bacon and egg rolls for breakfast.

Then enjoy lunch provided by the club for you and your families. Club Xmas raffle prizes will be drawn on the day, so get behind your club and grab some booklets of tickets from Kelly McFadyen at November's meeting or contact Kelly to get some. Sell to your family and colleagues! Buy lots yourself!

Bring your own drinks (alcoholic and otherwise) and nibbles for the day, and don't forget to bring yourself a chair, rug, your own picnic sets (plates, cutlery etc), stubby holders etc.

RSVP so you can be catered for! Let me know if you are coming, how many people are coming with you, and whether you will be diving in the morning so we can cater for you. Also, please let me know if you have any special dietary requirements - allergies/vegetarian/dairy/gluten-free etc.

If you can assist by bringing any trestle tables/tarps/tents/eskies or car fridges to keep things cool on the day, please let me know.

Contact Jason Coombs j.coombs@unsw.edu.au



St George Scuba Club Christmas Raffle \$2 ticket

The Club Christmas Raffle is on again this year, with 7 fantastic prizes on offer, plus some minor prizes to be drawn on 1 December at our Christmas Party.

Tickets are on sale now and are only \$2 each. Buy some for yourself, sell some to your family, friends, neighbours and work colleagues. We hope to raise \$1500.00 from the Club Christmas Raffle to cover the cost of prizes and our Christmas Party (est. \$1300.00) and fund other member benefits, such as free dive days and trip subsidies.

All 179 members are encouraged to buy/sell as many tickets as possible.

Tickets are available at the November Club Meeting, by post, at the Christmas Party or electronically (pay by EFT and I will write your tickets out for you).

The Prizes:

- 1st Prize: Full Ham and Full Hamper - valued at \$170
- 2nd Prize: Full Ham and bottle wine - valued at \$110
- 3rd Prize: Full Ham and bottle wine - valued at \$110
- 4th Prize: Half Ham - valued at \$60
- 5th Prize: Half Hamper - valued at \$60
- 6th Prize: Half Ham - valued at \$60
- 7th Prize: Half Hamper - valued at \$60



Minor Prizes: Minor prizes will include wine, books and dive bits and pieces - valued between \$10 - \$30.

I look forward to collecting all the Christmas Raffle Ticket stubs and cash by the Christmas Party on 1 December.

Contact Kelly McFadyen treasurer@stgeorgescubaclub.org.au



SEA BRAGGIN' LOST AND FOUND

We all know that the ocean is a harsh environment, and to have robust, reliable equipment, you have to spend a lot of money ... or do you? Meet the little light that could. Greg Blackburne brought me a nice surprise in the midst of baby and cat stories at a get-together for Tash and Digs. Greg handed me a torch that I accidentally sacrificed to Neptune over 5 months ago, when it slipped off my wrist while getting back on the boat at Osborne Shoals. This is one of the el-cheapo \$10 torches a number of club members have. Apart from a nice collection of barnacles, a lack of a shiny finish on the torch head, and a battery in need of a charge, the torch works perfectly. Greg was thinking he had found some extra gear until he turned it around and couldn't believe it - the torch belonged to a fellow St George Scuba Club member (unless there is another diver called Bram around). Here are some "before and after" shots of the heroic torch and its twin. Gotta be impressed with these little torches!



Bram Harris

See the photos below to watch the drama of the cheerful reunion unfold...





SEA BRAGGIN'



Photos by Shelley and Greg



South West Rocks Nov 2013

When: Friday 22 - Sun 24 Nov 2013

Weekend Package - 4 Dives / 2 Nights - \$320

Go up Friday afternoon and dive Saturday and Sunday

\$320 Includes:

- 4 Boat Dives
- 2 Nights accommodation
- Dive guide services
- Free Nitrox
- tanks provided on double dives
- Refreshments between dives
- Continental Breakfast daily
- Use of sheets and pillows

Let me know if you are interested and I will organise.

Contact Daniel Noble on 0422 461 500
or daniel.noble@covest.com.au



FRENCHMAN'S BAY

20 October 2013

After a week of bushfires the day dawned with good weather. For those divers arriving early it was cool and peaceful, with crystal clear water and a rising sun.



As the day warmed the other three boats plus 31 divers slowly arrived. Some were on the 8am dive, others the 9.30am dive. The boats shuttled the divers off to a variety of dive sites such as Henry's head, Minmi Trench and the Whale Watching platform, while others were busily preparing the food. The seas were flat with a slight swell from the NE and the sun was getting hot.

Returning divers reported visibility between 5 and 12m, with water temperatures ranging from 14 to 19 degrees. While the dives had been good, they now wanted a good feed and they weren't to be disappointed.

As they came up the beach the welcoming smells of BBQing sausages and meat patties wafted down to them. Once the food was ready people came armed with bread rolls, buns and plates so as to enjoy the offering. There was also an abundance of salads and later several large cheese cakes were seen to be being consumed.



As with most St George functions there was enough food to feed members several times over. I think there were many doggy bags sent off with members when they left.

Days such as this are only possible through the generosity of the boat owners, those who prepare the food, supply and set up the shade tents and those who take the time to cook for everyone. Without this assistance it would be just another dive without the social interaction.

Peter Flockart

SEA BRAGGIN'

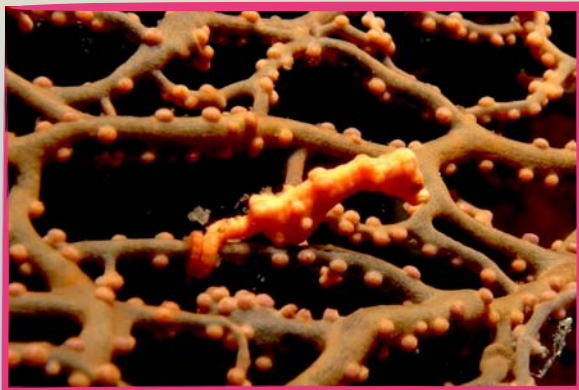




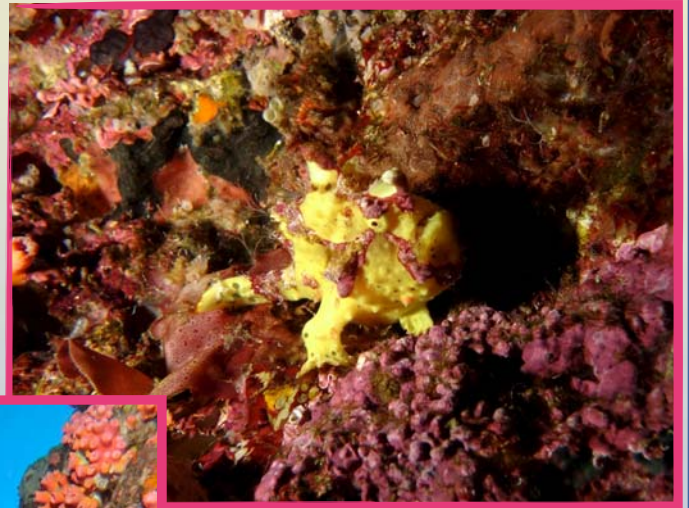
MOAL BOAL - THE PHILIPPINES

September 2013

Many friends told me about this place, as there's a huge group of sardines cruising around the shore. Luckily,



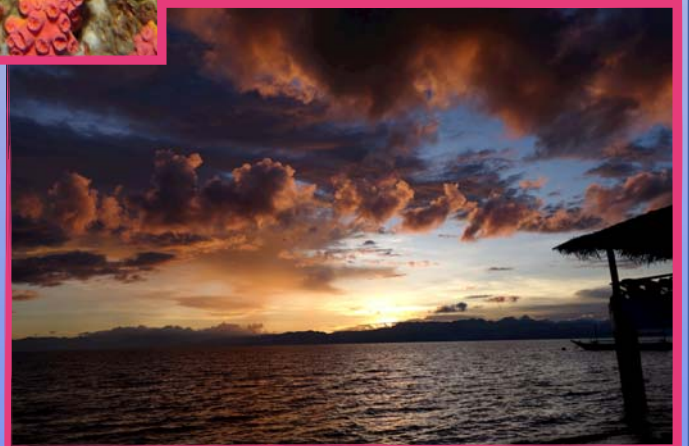
The most famous site here is the Pascador Island, just less than 15 minute boat ride from the shore. There are at least 10 dive sites around this island and they are all deep



the Philippines low-cost carrier, Cebu Pacific, has a discount price returning from Hong Kong to Cebu for less than AU\$120. In September, I made up my mind just one week's before heading there. Moal Boal (Pronunciation should be: Mo-ah-lu Bo-ah-lu) is a little town just 3-4 hours drive from the second largest city of the Philippines, Cebu, and it is on the northern shore of Cebu island. For most divers, the easiest way to reach there is to organise a pick-up van from the dive shop. It costs US\$50-60 for one trip (up to 4-5 persons per van depends on luggage). In terms of the dive shops, there are at least 5 shops. Some of them are local owned and one or two of them are owned by Europeans (Neptune Dive). I used the local one (Nelson's dive school) as they offered the cheapest price, ranging from AUD\$15-22 per dive if you have your own gear (they provide tanks and weights). If you do shore dives, the price is even cheaper than this. Here is a tip for divers, if you need any rental gears, don't use the local shops as their rental gear is nothing better than crap.

wall and drift dives. Huge fish sometimes can be spotted here. On one side is strong current, with gorgeous sea fans. Some of them are massive. However, the other side is relatively boring.

People told me sardines used to stay here, but after the tsunami or earthquake few years ago they disappeared for years and now have suddenly moved back to Moal Boal.



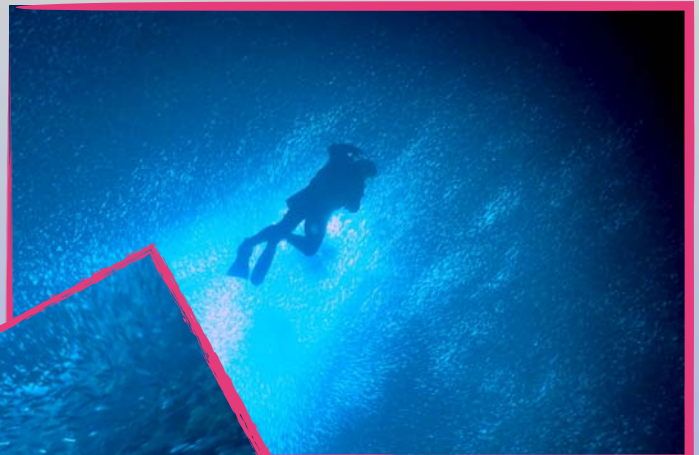
But for unknown reason, they choose to reside around the house reef instead of Pescador Island. We checked out the house reef for three dives and each time we saw a



huge group of sardines. There's no exception - it's 100% guaranteed to encounter them. Just dive at 15m +/- and they just keep flashing your eyes. If you want to take some breathtaking wide-angle shots, I recommend you to descent to 20-25m and shoot up towards the sun. Here are some of the photos and more of them are in my Facebook album.

Overall, good dives and affordable prices. However, the dive shop provides nearly no services except for tank and weights and carrying tanks to the boat for you. Never rely on them, but it's good if you're experienced divers as the DM just follow you around and give you 100% freedom. Definitely worth going for a short dive trip.

Tong Zheng





SEA BRAGGIN'

FIJI - BEQA SHARK DIVE

I recently attended a wedding on the Coral Coast of Fiji and had to do the shark dive reported last month. We did two reef dives in Beqa (pronounced Banga) Lagoon, followed by a double shark dive.

We probably saw 30 of the named Bull Sharks that are tracked by the locals. I have included 4 photos taken from a Canon Compact. One shot shows one shark taking a tuna head, fed by hand. Another shows 15 sharks in one exposure.

I highly recommend a trip down to Beqa Lagoon to witness this unique and well-controlled experience.

Rob Chenery



OSBORNE SHOALS

26 October 2013

Not much to write about for the club boat dive to Osborne Shoals on 26 October. Let's call it JAD (Just Another Dive)

- 5 Boats.
- 4 Dived Osborne.
- 1 Dived Pizza Reef (Le Scat).
- 3m visibility, a few Octopus around, Schooling Catfish and a Cuttlefish.

Wayne Heming





SEA BRAGGIN'

WHAT'S COMING UP?

WHEN	WHAT/ WHERE	CONTACT	WHEN	WHAT/ WHERE	CONTACT
Sat 9 Nov	Boat Dive Pizza Reef	Tricia Henry thentry456@bigpond.com	Sat 16 Nov	Boat Dive Yellow Rock/Sharks	Shelley Brueseker shellsb@bigpond.net.au
Sun 17 Nov	Shore Dive Shiprock	Paul Pacey paul.pacey@inet.net.au	Wed 20 Nov	Club Meeting Rowers on Cook Club	Gary Perkins perkinsdive@gmail.com
Sat 23 Nov	Boat Dive Artificial Reef	Peter Flockart pjflockart@speednet.com.au	Sat 30 Nov	Shore Dive & BBQ	Nancy Scoleri nancyscoleri@yahoo.com.au
Sun 1 Dec	Club Xmas Party	Jason Coombs j.coombs@unsw.edu.au	Sun 8 Dec	Deep Dive SS Tuggerah/ Undola	Michael McFadyen michael@michaelmfadyenscuba.info

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