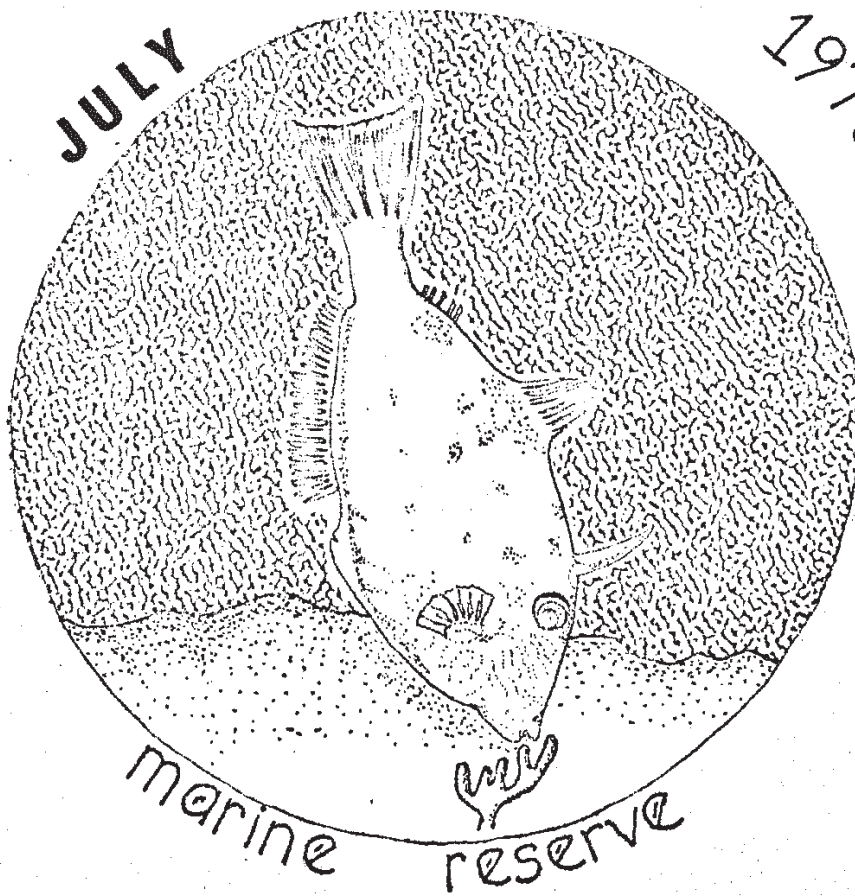


FLOTSAM

JULY

1976



SPECIAL GENERAL MEETING

The annual Special General Meeting for the election of club officers and committee will be held on Tuesday 20th July in Room 202 at 8.30 p.m. A film and refreshments will be provided. Nominations will be taken from the floor of the meeting, or given to Richard Willan.

POOR KNIGHTS TRIP 22 - 23 MAY

Friday 21st May

Forecast Northland and Auckland (To midnight Saturday)

- Moderate to strong southwest to southerly winds. A few isolated showers chiefly about the ranges but mainly fair with mild daytime temperatures,
- Boaties forecast for the weekend: Continuing southerly winds gusting up to 10 knots with mainly fine weather.

Saturday 22nd May

As dawn broke a small weak sun slowly prised itself up over the hills and across the bay, could it be so close to 7.45 a.m.?

The sleepy eyed, hardy, unsuspecting divers slowly began to gather with their gear at the Tutukaka Wharf. The "Lady Jess" was being prepared by her owner Trevor Williams and skipper Ross Coteral for the days unforeseen torrid excursion.

The weather prospects of the day looking 100% better than from the expected forecasts of previous days.

After loading the gear aboard in double quick time we had a minor delay (yes delay), caused by one of our better known members. Anyway this reddish faced diver was awaiting his bottles which were still being filled at the shore. Fancy bringing empties on a diving trip.

We got on our way by 8.05 rocking and rolling in great style towards the Poor Knights, there were the odd pale faces but no wasted breakfasts. On arriving at our destination around 10.00 a.m. we started eliminating our previously planned diving locations. The northern archway was very rough due to the prevailing southeasterly wind with a good rip running through it. We proceeded to the western side of the Northern Island and dived in a very pleasant calm bay off the Crystal Cave. This was suited to the greater percentage of the days divers who were mostly novices, with depths that were not too excessive.

The dive was enjoyed by all groups and the following are some typical summerising comments:-

1. Snorklers: "good shallow water with plenty to look at"
2. Scuba (lookers): "good especially in the shallows"
3. Scuba (photographers): "fish a little scarce but OK"

Lunch time was spent just north of Hope Point where eight bodies splashed around enjoying the life of the ocean especially the large number of stingrays (9 - 12) taking everyone's interest.

Our final move for the day took us to the favourite Southern Harbour on Bishops Cave where conditions were only just conducive to diving, but by 3.00 the conditions were nearly unsuitable. The viz for the day was around 50', very good considering the existing and previous days weather.

The trip back again saw the boat rocking and rolling with the odd yachtie and landlubbers just finding the seas too much. The day ended in fine style with 50% of the divers heading back to Auckland and the remainder to brave the night and face up to a second day.
Sunday 23rd May

The day again was a beauty with a small swell coming in from the south-east. We got away from the wharf at 8.20 and again headed out to the Knights with several divers being seriously effected by the swell. The sun was beautiful and most welcome with five divers utilising all available deck space on the Lady Jess for attempting to dry out their wetsuits from the previous days excursions.

Arriving again up near the northern archway we had to abandon the idea of a dive here due to the still prevailing weather, at this stage we decided to dive in Skull Bay (Taravana Cave). Here we spent half an hour watching Trevor and Ross displaying fine examples of seamanship as they attempted to anchor the "Lady Jess" - needless to say this half hour was spent lowering and raising the anchor with patience and tempers not having equal portions of raising and lowering.

By the time we were successfully anchored 4 keen divers had already entered the water, the majority of the divers were just glad of the delay in calm waters so their constitutions could stabilise.

Report from the divers who summed up as follows:-

"The area was a good dive with plenty of fish life" (i.e. everyone enjoyed themselves)

and from those who ventured down to the Taravana Cave -

"Talk about black mate" (- yes it was).

For lunch and a snorkel we took refuge in Maroro Bay which was also calm and gave plenty of scope for exploration.

On entering the Bay most of the divers' attention was taken by the schooling Tarakihi and Trevally, which several keen divers on snorkel armed with cameras went in pursuit of, the results were a foregone conclusion by observations and comments from the boat.

Because of the weather and most of all the satisfaction of the divers we remained in this Bay for our second scuba dive which turned out to be most relaxing and enjoyable with plenty to do and look at down under.

Heading back was a far better deal and the most pleasant trip of the weekend as rains had calmed the seas a little and everyone had a comfortable journey back. Needless to say there were many lethargic bodies at the Wharf and speed of off-loading the gear had nothing on getting it all on board the two previous mornings.

TREAT OF THE WEEKEND

Watching one scuba diver try to physically strangle to death his camera at depth because it was reluctant to flash.

PAUL FAIRBAIRN

(Dive Leader)

"OCEANS '76"

"Oceans '76" held over the weekend of 22 and 23 May was well worth attending, even if it meant foregoing a 'Knights Trip'. "Oceans" was a really great show, probably because of the range of subjects presented at the conference sessions. You name it - every underwater activity was covered by one speaker or another. Lectures ranged from underwater medicine to wrecks, marine reserves, marine biology, commercial diving to box nets. The speakers were as varied as their subjects, foremost amongst them were the overseas visitors: Dr. Pilmanis from California; Steve Parish; Neville Coleman and Reg Lipsom from Australia. With such a variety of entertainments, "Oceans" couldn't have helped being a success and interest to all who attended.

The visual attractions (slides, films and live mermaid) were undoubtedly highlights of the conference. Steve Parish presented a mind-blowing fantasy officially entitled "Natural History Photography", but which he subtitled "Frustration, Agony and Ecstasy". Steve gave his own definition of discovery: "Discovery is to take the lens cap off". Neville Coleman also presented a display of magnificent slides, these are part of his collection for the "Australian Marine Photographic Index". This collection already has some 20,000 transparencies, many were taken during a four-year long expedition diving all round the Australian coastline. Both speakers emphasized the need to open ones eyes underwater, to look and then look again, and then even familiar organisms will show new behaviours or unexpected associated organisms will appear.

These brilliant slides did serve to emphasize one contrast for me, dwelling on a theme that several of the speakers touched upon. In the foyer to the conference hall, some overzealous diver had organized a display of frozen fish - what a sad collection! Colours vanished, scales missing, fins and tails shredded, evil-smelling and indeed less life-like than the painted model of a 100 pound kingie. Surely these cannot be the same creatures that we see alive in the ocean and that the slides captured so excellently. Slides of fish feeding, mating, sleeping and swimming serve to demonstrate, as Tony Ayling suggested, that we should regard fish as intelligent, versatile and sensitive marine creatures; no less "alive" than the birds of the air. Neville Coleman repeatedly asserted the contrast between the limited usefulness of dead specimens in museums and the wealth of information open to sharp-eyed divers, so much awaits to be discovered by those who study and photograph living organisms in the sea. I hope that this is the last time organisers of marine displays resort to incorporating dead exhibits purporting to be living fishes.

The film festival on Saturday night was a climax to the whole programme. My awards went to a home-grown production "The Call of the Sea" about diving off the north east coast of New Zealand; to a short but amusing film entitled "Fish Antics" and to "In Search of the Bow-head Whale".

I will conclude by recounting some of the more numerous incidents and personally interesting facts to come out of the conference. We heard how Kelly Tarlton was so impoverished by his early salvage attempts that his wife was forced to cook "starfish soup" nightly to sustain them both. That was of course before he discovered the wreck of the "Tasmania" off Mahia and recovered some of the Rothschild jewels. He told the audience about the real problems of such a salvage venture where one month's diving now costs \$1,000 for petrol alone.

Doug Thomas, from the commercial underwater firm of "Oceaneering Ltd" came complete with a promotional film. He talked about a diver's life on a drilling vessel and about his current duties of laying pipelines to service the "Mauri" field. The work is demanding, for example when a pipeline breaks in half and drops from the barge into 320 feet, divers are then called to do repairs. Repairs at this depth involve saturation diving. This particular task was completed in 30 bottom hours using 320 feet as "storage depth",

divers worked in hot water suits and one diver spent 6 hours working outside the chamber on the bottom - imagine that 6 hours at 320 feet! Even the three days decompression period after such a dive is a pretty sobering thought. Following his film, Doug was asked the inevitable question concerning payment for dives such as this one. He mused: "The reward can be great".

Winstone Taylor recounted the agony he had endured in trying to feed a particularly choosy tropical fish when it first arrived in his aquarium - his answer came in the form of green peas. In fact he succeeded in keeping this species alive for 5 or 6 years on a staple diet of green peas.

RICHARD WILLAN

LIZARD ISLAND HABITAT, GREAT BARRIER REEF

Lizard Island is an unusual island of the northern Great Barrier Reef, a high granite peak surrounded by underwater deep blues and alive, constantly, with the moving forms of animals. It is visible 17 miles away from the coast of Australia and rises in slopes of wattle and gumtree 360 metres. During the day it is intense with heat, tempered by south-east trades, towards night there descends a greying peace.

Captain Cook was the first European to land on Lizard Island. In August of 1770 he climbed to the top in search of a passage through the Outer Barrier Reef. Now the island is a National Park of Queensland. It is only 3 km² in extent, with a southern lagoonal area of deep water channels and intertidal reef, connected to two small peaks, Palfrey and South Islands.

The Blue Lagoon was the area in which I worked during March, at the end of the rainy season, studying the sponges there. I had come to determine whether the sponges of this tropical locality possessed toxins, and if so the degree of pharmaceutical activity. If such substances did exist they could be extracted and examined for possible uses by the pharmaceutical industry. Also arising from this study would be comparative information on the toxicity of sponges here with the temperate species already examined in New Zealand.

The lagoon offers a variety of sponge habitats to investigate. There are patch reefs on sand flats, intertidal and deep water coral reefs. The sand reefs are peculiar to these few "continental" islands, a result of erosion of the granite peaks. Sponges are important features of the sand flats but are more cryptically located in the intertidal and deeper reefs, beneath coral rubble.

The sponge study was a small part of my overall sensing of how the whole island went about life. I was fascinated by the diversity and brilliance of the fish. I was even led astray by a triggerfish. On my first dive I came across the White-Barred Triggerfish (Rhinocarpus aculeatus), not flying about overhead like any normal fish but firmly stuck in a rubble crevice. I thought there was no time to spare. Poor fish, I began frantically digging him out till I saw out of the corner of my eye another one and another one, a whole city of them all in the same predicament.

On many dives I was aware of the presence of sharks as soon as I jumped in, usually the Black Tip or the White Tip but I was lucky enough not to actually land on one, a memorable experience of an Australian Museum member. Sharks were no bother but were constantly there.

On several occasions in the late afternoon I observed strange activity. Fish of all sorts were madly feeding all together. The noise was incredible chomp, chomp, scrape. Sharks came to look at this frenzy of movement. This behaviour is termed heterotypic schooling and is probably a defensive activity, making it harder for a predator to rush in and be able to focus on one fish. The members are usually not the brightly coloured reef fish, although these may join in. Studies on the groups have revealed that some

members do not feed with the groups but later at night break away to do so.

The land was equally exciting. During the hottest part of the day sand goannas may be heard rustling through the tall grass. Suddenly one wavers into view - head moving side to side, tongue flicking rapidly. You examine his yellow patterning and the long wavering marks of his tail in the sand till abruptly he senses your presence. All movement in the goanna ceases, he stands high on his back legs and tail, like a kangaroo with arms pressed close to body, head watchful, still. Around his feet, oblivious, rush little skinks tripping sand grains into antlion pits with their tongues and catching the little larva as it jumps up to grasp its supposed prey. The goanna relaxes, brings its body down and wavers slowly off.

AVRIL WATSON

COMMON SENSE AND NIGHT DIVING

On a recent trip with another club, I used up a half-empty tank of air on a short night dive with 3 divers, 2 of whom were making their first night dive. We went down to 22 m, and several crayfish were collected. When we returned to the boat, the enthusiastic reports of the novices (and more especially the crayfish which they displayed) induced another pair of divers to start suiting up for a night dive. One of that pair was a youngster, who had previously told me that he was not enthusiastic about the prospect of diving at night, and I had then advised him not to attempt a night dive until he had become very keen on the idea.

When they were nearly ready, I learnt that the elder diver had also never dived at night. I expressed my unease at the prospect of two divers making their first night dives together, without a more experienced diver accompanying them. Several other divers supported my expression of concern, but no-one was willing to forbid the novices to make their dive.

Accordingly, I decided to lead that dive myself, although I was not very happy at the thought of making another dive to 22 m so soon after the previous one, on which I had not taken my DCP. I instructed the novices to follow me closely, to keep within touching distance of one another, to make frequent checks on their depth and contents gauges, and to be particularly careful about ascending slowly.

Before I had got all of my gear back on, the elder diver had jumped in without waiting for me to check his equipment. After the youngster and I had joined him, we swam for a minute before he found that a back-pack strap was un-done, and he had to return to the boat to get it adjusted. After he had re-joined us, and we had checked each other's air-valves, he swam rapidly ahead to the cliff and dived down to 10 m without waiting for us, whereupon his light went out. He had not bothered to borrow an underwater torch but had simply taken his own torch, which had been advertised as being "water-proof"!

The two of us joined him with our torches and we proceeded down the cliff-face to 22 m, with the youngster collecting crayfish and the elder carrying the sack. The youngster became so excited by the experience that he dashed around without waiting for me, making it difficult for me to make frequent checks on his instruments. However, he did eventually show me that his air was nearly finished, and we immediately headed for the surface. The elder diver (without a light) had been following us closely on the sea-bed, but when I somersaulted at 6 m depth to empty my buoyancy compensator he continued to the surface alone, without a torch. One of the divers from the boat promptly rowed the dinghy across to us, and towed us back to the boat.

Both the novices were very happy with having made that night dive, but their

enjoyable experience could easily have become a disaster. If they had not been accompanied, then the failure of one torch could very well have caused panic. They could easily have become separated, and would have been likely to forget to check their instruments. (It is quite a startling experience to suddenly find oneself without air, at 18 m depth on one's first night dive!)

Divers should always remember that a night dive is inherently more hazardous than a day-time dive. If commonsense precautions are taken, then those additional hazards can be largely eliminated, and a night dive can be a highly enjoyable experience. But each novice needs thorough instruction and careful guidance when first making a dive at night, which could so easily become a frightening experience, or even a catastrophe.

GARRY J. TEE