

By Simon Penprase

Vice President's Report

2010/2011

This report aims to summarise the club's activities during the 2010/2011 financial year, and to provide an outline of the trips and events proposed for the new year. During the last year I fulfilled the functions of the Vice President, Equipment Officer, and Promotions Officer, so the focus of this report will be in these three areas.

Our first dive trip for the year was a camping trip to our favourite island in the Palm Group, Pelorus Island over the 2nd to the 5th of July 2010. Vince took part of the group up in his 16m vessel, 'Katerina', and the following day we picked up the remainder of the group from Lucinda, with a little assistance from the Palm Island Ferry.

We had good weather for this trip, and completed some really interesting dives. We even convinced Robyn to join us for a night dive, and Jeff provided some underwater entertainment with his rendition of a diver swimming away from a large and unfriendly looking shark! Some unusual critters were spotted during this trip, including a Flute Fish, a Decorator Crab, heaps of Giant Clams, and a full sized manikin named 'Judas'.

Our next dive outing was a trip to the Orpheus Island Research Station over the 21st to the 22nd of August. This trip was conducted under the station's volunteer program, where we provided the staff with volunteer labour, in exchange for some diving in areas not usually frequented by recreational divers. We found the visibility at sites south of the station to be a little poor, but the channel in between Orpheus and Pelorus Island made for a pleasant dive among some low lying coral and shallow gutters.

For those that hadn't already fallen out of their bunk bed, we launched into action the next morning completing various jobs around the station. Tasks included oven cleaning, lawn mowing and edging, SCUBA cylinder cleaning and

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maintenance, safety equipment audits, laboratory cleaning, weeding, and path raking and clearing. Before leaving on the Sunday afternoon, several members of the group took a nice hike over the ridgeline, to get a view of the western side of the island.

Our September dive trip consisted of a small group of intrepid explorers heading over to Magnetic Island in a small hire boat, with aspirations of diving Orchid Rocks. Unfortunately, we were overzealous with our gear and weight and didn't reach our intended site; instead we visited Coconut Reef in front of Base Back Packers, and the Picnic Bay Jetty.

Both sites made for interesting dives. We had large Remoras following us throughout our dive on Coconut Reef, and we found a huge amount of treasure under the Jetty. We also saw a Stone Fish on each dive, and became well acquainted with discarded fishing gear, baby Lion Fish, and big scary rays!

After not quite making Orchid Rocks in September, I was still determined to dive the site, and on the 31st of October, Vince took a group of divers over to the island. We weren't blessed with great visibility, but the site is definitely worth the effort. There are large undercut sections at 12m, and the outside of the structure has cracks running its full height which provide shelter for plenty of fish. Ian found a turtle close to the surface, and Vince and I found a large Barramundi.

The following weekend a group of 18 divers boarded Dave Stewart's boat the M.V. Kalinda for a weekend dive trip to the wreck of the S.S. Yongala and Wheeler Reef. The weather leading up to this weekend looked a little ominous, although we were still able to complete two action packed dives on the Yongala on the Saturday, before moving to beautiful (pre-cyclone) Wheeler that evening.

The current on the Yongala was really ripping along from the bow to the stern of the wreck, which meant that most divers didn't venture too far from the diver access point attached to the wreck's bow bollard. This still gave viewers an ideal vantage point from which to observe the marine life, and divers reported seeing a huge school of mature Chevron Barracuda, a couple of Eagle Rays, turtles, and snakes.

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We completed some interesting dives around the Wheeler Reef mooring that afternoon and evening. Divers found a school of around 20 large Bump Head Parrot Fish, which moved around as one solid green mass and chomped on the coral like a herd of grazing cattle. Split Rock just near the mooring was very interesting, and I found it amusing to see so many glass fish living in such close proximity to very plump Coral Trout!

The next morning we completed two more dives, and most people elected to start by swimming down Shark Alley, before working their way along the reef edge. Joanne and I saw several yellow Trumpet Fish, and we found a patch of Garden Eels living in the sand in front of the reef edge.

On our last dive, I wanted to really get among the gutters and swim-throughs scattered along the reef edge, and we covered a lot of distance to make it all the way to the point where the coral cay is visible on a low tide. Part way along the reef face we found several pieces of debris which looked like the remains of a boat, and I wondered if this was the remains of a boat that had featured in Ken's tale of the sinking of a charter boat. I have since learnt from a couple of very reliable sources that indeed these are the sunken remains regaled in Ken's story.

Our last club activity for 2010 was held on the 11th of December, with a visit to the Townsville Maritime Museum, drinks at the Yacht Club, and dinner at the Metropole Hotel. We had eight members go through the exhibits at the Museum, all funded by the club through the sale of tomato chilli chutney, but more on that later.

Many of us had not visited the Museum before, and we were all quite impressed by the amount and variety of information on display. My favourites were the Yongala Exhibit, a film showing Mike Ball and Ron and Valerie Taylor diving on the wreck in the 1980s, and the interactive rope knot tying wall!

The 2011 calendar year started with some horrendous weather, including seemingly never ending rain, T.C. Anthony, and T.C. Yasi. It was Easter before the club got back into the water as a group, and what a way to return to diving! On Easter Friday a group of 10 NQUEC divers headed out from Alva Beach to dive the Yongala aboard the Yongala Express.

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The weather really turned it on for us, the water was nearly glassed out and within 30 minutes we were at the wreck site. On the surface at the start of the first dive we encountered a nasty little current, but that soon abated as we descended on the bow. We made our way along the deck side towards the stern and the first thing we noticed was the new orientation of the wreck. The cyclone gave the old girl a big shake up, and it now sits with its starboard side pushed hard against the sand. This means more of the wreck's cargo has spilled out onto the sea floor, and Ray found some clay bricks and glass bottles.

On the second dive we found a 2m long Guitar Shark and a really big turtle with its shell covered in barnacles. At the stern the marine growth has been completely stripped, leaving a clean and bare hull. A row of about eight port holes can be found along the port side up near the stern, and we could even see solid rivets used to join the ship's hull plates. Back at the bow, the anchor and the attached chain links can now be clearly identified, and under the bow we found a 2m long QLD Grouper.

Our trip home was just as smooth, and we were back on the beach within 30 minutes. What a fantastic way to kick off the 2011 dive calendar!

Our next club dive outing was a Whitsundays Trip aboard the M.V. Yaran over the weekend of the 30th of April to the 1st of May. The group consisted of seven divers from the club, two dive instructors, and our skipper Max. After departing the Able Point Marina Saturday morning, we did our first dive at Manta Ray Bay, Hook Island, before heading further off-shore to dive a series of sites at Bait Reef.

It became immediately clear to me that this reef was as good, if not better than Wheeler Reef, (pre cyclone). We found bommies rising up from 30m, swim-throughs, and overhangs, and the marine life was great too. We found Cow-Tail Rays, large Coral Trout, heaps of Anemones, and all in visibility of up to 20m.

That evening we did a night dive on a site known locally to be a sleeping ground for turtles, and we certainly found plenty, but excitement on this dive came from the resident Giant Trevally. Whenever our torches lit up a small fish, a big GT rushed in to grab it, even if we were in their way!

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For our first dive the next morning, our dive guides took us all into a structure called 'the Chimney' which proved a very accurate description. We entered a hole in the reef edge and followed a passage that opens up into a round chamber within the centre of a large bommie that is open to the surface.

Our last dive for the weekend was fairly action-packed as 'Betty' our tender, nearly became 'Bottomy' our wreck dive! Despite the eventful start to the dive, our guide took us on another excellent route through and around the coral, and safely back to the main boat.

This trip to the Whitsunday region was the first trip the club has done to this area for some time, and it was good to get out and do some dives on what seemed to us as new and exciting sites.

On the 29th of May, the club held a second activity for the month with a Strand social BBQ breakfast and muck-dive. We combined a muck-dive around the Rock Pool wall with a BBQ breakfast on the head-land. The dive was aborted due to poor visibility, but the day proved a success, and 14 members attended.

We finished the financial year with a second trip to Pelorus Island over the 11th to the 13th of June. Half the group left Townsville with Vince, while the other participants left from Lucinda and met us at Pelorus. Each time we visit Pelorus there are subtle changes, but this was our first trip to the island after cyclone Yasi . The better diving around the inside of the island now seems to be along the fringing reef at the northern end of the beach.

A few of us tried out some new toys, some went island vegetable shopping, some battled the elements, some went exploring, most of us did some interesting dives, we all put in some camp fire time, and most importantly - everyone had a good time!

That's an overview of the diving conducted by the club this past year, but along with the diving, the club has maintained a strong focus on fundraising and promotions.

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Fundraising began with the production of the second batch of tomato chilli chutney when tomato prices dropped to 85 cents per kilo. This has been a success and the club has gained \$200 from the sale of chutney. We have also made a significant dent in the number of club stubby coolers remaining from the previous financial year.

Many members have taken the opportunity to lighten their holdings of pre-loved household goodies and workshop treasures by donating them to the next club garage sale. Some of the larger items such as washing machines and sofa beds were sold through the local paper, and I am slowly amassing all sorts of items for the next sale in October this year.

On the 8th of May the club held its second Bunning's Sausage Sizzle at the new Fairfield Waters Store. We had some pretty bad weather, but the club raised nearly \$500 for the day.

Throughout the year I've also been busy fulfilling the role of the Equipment Officer, and much of the equipment has been either refurbished or replaced. Our club compressor underwent a service and an air quality test, and the club's hire cylinders have been replaced with new aluminium cylinders. A comprehensive and easy to follow set of instructions has also been supplied for the compressor. This document has been designed to complement the original manuals which have now been sourced for the equipment, and all documents remain protected within laminated sleeves and water resistant folders.

All of the club's camping gear bags have been replaced, and the heavy items have been repackaged into smaller quantities to allow for easier transportation. New 10 litre fuel containers have been purchased for the compressor, which makes for easier and safer handling. Much effort has also been directed towards making the club's safety gear and tooling water proof, through the purchase of water proof tool boxes and 'Pelican' style hard cases. Our first aid kit now has a detailed and easy to use inventory, and our oxygen kit now has a set of simple instructions. The club's tarpaulin poles and peg caps now even glow in the dark, with the application of luminescent tape, and we now have a suitable hammer to drive in the pegs with.

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The club's hot plate has been cleaned up, the handles have been painted, a bag has been supplied for the accessories, and most importantly; a handle has been welded onto the plate for easy carriage.

Club equipment is now protected through a photographic inventory of all items, which has been combined with laminated copies of all receipts in order to prove club ownership. All pieces of equipment have also been properly labelled with the club's name, and where necessary the item's intended use.

Many pieces of equipment have also been donated to the club, including a boat size dive flag, a surface towed dive flag with reel and weight, a trolley for the compressor, a bucket used during cylinder filling, a collapsible table, an axe complete with head protector, and several hand tools for the compressor kit.

The club now has a safety information folder for use by the Dive Officer at any club dive activity. The folder contains our NQUEC dive log sheets and Participant Information Sheets, risk assessment information, safe dive practices and check lists, the QLD Recreational SCUBA Diving and Snorkelling Code of Practice, and many other useful articles such as tide charts, GBRMPA zoning maps, and boat licensing and safety equipment requirements.

Throughout the year our Web Master has done a fantastic job updating, amending, and uploading articles to our website. All of the club trip reports, upcoming events, safety information, club forms, and insurance documents have been posted for easy access by members and to promote the club to potential members.

Lots of time and effort has also been devoted to the area of memberships, and a streamlined yet comprehensive Buddy Line will be provided to the incoming Membership Officer.

There are plenty of trips and activities on the radar for the new financial year, here's a snap shot to wet your appetite!

A day diving Acheron Island, a Garden Party at Steve and Jane's, a Magnetic Island social weekend, a Lake Eacham dive trip, a Lady Bowen dive trip, a S.S.

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Yongala slide night, a Strand night dive, dives on a WWII bomber wreck, reef trips aboard Katerina with Vince, a social BBQ breakfast, and more.

Well, that completes a wrap up of the club's activities over the last 12 months. Thanks to all the outgoing office bearers and club members for your individual and collective contributions. We have several more trips planned for the rest of the year, so come along, get involved, and let's get stuck into some more diving!