

Clean Up Australia Day 2008

This year NQUEC participated in CUA Day at Orpheus Island over the weekend of the 19th and 20th of April. We had attempted to conduct the trip over the 4th and 5th of March, but bad weather forced us to postpone the trip until April.

We met Lachin the boat skipper from Orpheus Island Research Station (OIRS) at Taylors Beach Saturday morning. By 9:00am we had loaded up Challenger III (the main OIRS boat) and were heading over to the island. Six members participated from NQUEC, Yvonne, Simon, Joe, Gary, Lisanne and Mike and four members from JCU Dive Club, Catherine, Dieter, Josef and Laetitia.

OIRS staff gave us an induction upon arrival, and Gary and I received the boat handlers brief. We were grateful to have the use of two small boats for Saturday, which allowed us to reach Yanks Jetty, an area identified as requiring some underwater cleaning.

We dived Yanks Jetty on a receding tide which made moving around under the jetty a little tricky. There wasn't much rubbish here, except for the odd bottle, and a few dislodged items from the jetty such as hand railing and tyres. The visibility was fairly low, but the overall colour and health of the reef surrounding the jetty seemed quite good. There are a couple of really big clams near the old structure on the southern side of the current jetty. Yanks Jetty also hosts a reasonably large school of small fish seeking protection in its shadows, and several juvenile coral trout and red emperor can be found around the coral head at the end of the jetty.



We stayed at Yanks Jetty for a little while after the dive, had some lunch and took in the idyllic scenery. We then headed to Little Pioneer Bay beyond the research station to dive the public moorings. The visibility here was particularly bad, but we were still able to fill three bags with bottles and cans plus a saucepan and a frying pan.

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The poor visibility and featureless underwater terrain at the moorings produced some long surface swims, however Catherine and Dieter performed a text book navigational effort by surfacing a metre from their boat!

We returned to the station around 5:00pm and were soon preparing a good meal and having some drinks. The facilities at the research station are impressive. The communal dining area has a commercial grade kitchen, large fridges and a BBQ facility

The next morning we walked over the ridgeline to clean up the coral beach on the western side of the island. The track is well marked, but the 40 to 45 minute walk can be steep and hard-going in places. We didn't see any snakes and had no trouble from mosquitoes or sand flies, however one of the party had an encounter with an "Orpheus Island Man Eating Spider"

The coral beach was in need of some serious cleaning. In two hours we completely filled 27 council supplied CUA Day bags and gathered several larger items such as a car wheel and tyre, plastic pallets, children's play equipment, broken fishing nets, crab pots and many metres of rope.



We stacked the bags and the additional loose rubbish at the centre of the beach under a group of pandanus palms. Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service has made a generous offer to remove the rubbish at a suitable time.

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We then hiked back to the station, had lunch and prepared for a recreational dive on the point at the southern end of Pioneer Bay. The OIRS dive area makes gearing up for a dive a pleasure. It has a remote tank filling station, wardrobe style hanging areas, ample bench space, deep sinks and external showers. We were also very grateful Lachin was able to ferry our SCUBA units and weights to and from the dive site with a fork lift.

Most people dived the site as a shallow wall dive, heading out of the bay in 6m to 8m, then turning around and returning among the shallows. The visibility was still quite low, but I was surprised by the structure of the coral formations in shallow water. We found tiny ledges, swim-throughs and small plate corals. Mike and I found a patch of large clams closely packed together, and an interesting mixture of fish life. We saw several species of sweetlips, good size coral trout, a school of yellow tail fusilier, slady bream and a "Yongala size" adult bat fish which looked very out of place. We also found a couple of black and white wart slugs and an intensely coloured orange nudibranch.

After the dive we filled the tanks, cleaned the kitchen and accommodation and waited for the tide to rise. By Sunday afternoon the weather had settled and Lachin took us back to Taylors Beach in the stations' long boat.

A big thanks is extended to Kylie, Lachin, Louise and all the OIRS staff for transporting our group, lending us the boats, accommodating us and for assisting us in many other ways which combined to produce a really enjoyable and successful CUA Day activity.

Well done Ann-Maree for conceiving the idea, putting us in touch with people and getting the activity started. Thanks Maddy for registering our club with the CUA Day organisers, and Robyn for collecting the council supplied equipment. Thankyou Neil and Liz for ferrying our drivers, looking after our cars and for baking us that delicious chocolate cake.

And finally, thanks very much to our volunteers who have certainly made a positive contribution to the health and cleanliness of Orpheus Island.