



PELORUS ISLAND DIVE REPORT

By Simon Penprase

The first NQUEC Pelorus trip for 2009 was conducted over the 18th to the 20th of September. The weather looked ominous as we travelled towards Ingham on Friday morning, but blue skies finally appeared as we approached Taylor's Beach. Our group consisted of Dave, Chris, Irena, Robyn, Ian, Breda, Kieran, Dan, Anusha, Jeff, Susan, Tony and I. We met Kylie and Lachin aboard Challenger III and soon had our gear loaded, after a short interlude for Dave and Chris whilst they took in the sights of Forrest Beach and met some of the locals.

The boat ride over to the island was good, although we set up 'Camp NQUEC' with a few additional tie-downs to account for a gusty northerly wind. By lunch time people were entering the water for their first dives and reasonable visibility was reported left of the camp site heading south towards Orpheus Island.

Robyn and I found some interesting fish on our first dive, including a barramundi cod, nice size coral trout, a purple octopus, sling-jaw wrasse, cream and black nudibranchs and an ornate lobster.

That afternoon Ian, Dave, Chris and Dan fished the rocky points at both ends of the beach. A 5kg trevally was caught and released and two long-toms were caught, one of which was released into the very appreciative jaws of two small reef sharks observing the anglers.

The tide was quite high late in the afternoon which suited a night dive, making water entry in front of the creek mouth very comfortable. Dave, Jeff, Tony and I dived in front of the camp site in the shallow water where the small reef wall runs parallel to the beach. This was a very interesting dive; we saw another long-tom attacking a smaller fish, a slipper lobster and a large shelled mollusc moving over the sand with its proboscis fully outstretched.

After dinner we enjoyed a few drinks around our modest fire, and were introduced to a resident tarantula that had made its home in the log we were sitting on. Dave and I took a couple of photos of it and I learnt just how quickly I can jettison a thong, after thinking the beastie had crawled across my foot!

The next morning started with grey skies and a touch of rain, but by 9 am it had started to clear up. People dived both the northern and southern ends of the beach, although strong current was reported towards the northern rocky point.

Garry arrived with his daughter Shanna mid morning, coinciding with the high tide. I dived with Garry towards the southern end of the beach and we followed the reef wall along at a depth of about 15m. The number of sea whips and fan corals in this area is quite impressive, especially the giant black coral tree full of filter feeders and juvenile bat fish and red emperor.

The club did its part for International Clean up Day on Saturday afternoon, with one and half 80 litre garbage bags filled with flotsam and other rubbish collected from the beach and the area above the camp sites.

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More dives were conducted Saturday afternoon, and some interesting critters were reported. Jeff found two very large cuttle-fish, another barramundi cod and more ornate lobsters. Robyn also proved that snakes do exist on Pelorus, and apparently they like to position themselves on the tracks leading behind the camp sites.

The high tide Saturday night again made for an easy night dive, and Dave managed to talk Chris into joining the group for a dive out in front of the camp site. Dave reported having an encounter with a huge lobster, and was astounded when he found he could not fit his outstretched hand across its shell! He returned beaming with enthusiasm and couldn't wait to regale Mike with his story of the monster from the deep!

Our fire Saturday night was much larger than the first night, as we had anticipated Garry's appreciation of a good camp fire. We all ate like kings in an attempt to lighten our eskies before our departure the following day, and a few of us stayed up and swapped embellished stories over a few glasses of tawny port.

The final dives were conducted Sunday morning, and some more angling was done before our pick up at 10:30 am. Weather on Sunday was perfect and we had a beautiful trip back over glassy water.

The diving over the weekend was quite impressive, even though there were some strong currents and poor visibility. We saw quite a few lobsters, including another group of divers staying at the northern camp site who found two large lobsters on their night dive. The amount and variety of fish was quite high. We saw some unusual and rare creatures and in general the area seems to provide habitat for a healthy stock of fish in their juvenile stages. I noticed on several occasions being followed for the duration of the dive by a flotilla of both yellow tail and black spot fusilier. Perhaps fish use the shelter the island affords to attain some size, before moving out to the reef.

The Pelorus trip has capped off a successful month for the club, both in terms of activities and meeting new members. I'd like to welcome the new club members who joined in this week end, and hope you enjoyed your first Pelorus trip, NQUEC style!

Thankyou Garry for bringing over the allen-key set, the extra ice for our eskies and for taking some of the rubbish we collected back to the mainland.

Well done Dave and Chris for transporting the compressor and other large club items up and back with your utility.

Finally, thanks very much Yvonne for the efforts you made to get this trip, the charter and all the communal equipment organised, especially straight after the club's party.