

Spring 2012

a whale of a time

a Kenyan adventure

Ian Young and Tim Slow

Our trip to Kenya started badly. After booking and paying the deposit, Dave Hughes – our expert resident club travel arranger – reported back that ‘Thomas Cook’ had suddenly decided in May they weren’t flying to Mombasa and had cancelled our holiday.

Mr Hughes was quickly on the case (as to be expected) and after another well placed expletive or two in the direction of the travel agent, a new package was booked with ‘Hayes and Jarvis’, who were faultless.

We travelled via Nairobi on ‘Kenya Airways’ with the big advantage being 2 x 23kg baggage allowance + 10kg hand luggage. We were also able to be more flexible on the flights and left the UK late on Friday returning home very early on the following Monday maximising the holiday for only taking five days leave.

so the diving then

Dave picked ‘Buccaneer Diving’ because they have centres at a number of different locations, offer Nitrox, had sunk a wreck to dive on and came across as a very professional organisation which turned out to be correct.

There was a short walk each morning to the dive centre in the hotel grounds, and all six of us had a great week, each completing ten dives over

Backdrop: turtle at Shark Point

the five days. We dived the wreck of *Dania* twice (running like a train on the first occasion but calmer the second time)...do they know the meaning of slack water? Then we did three dives at *Shark Point* where we saw sharks and turtles each time.

Then there were the *Vuma Caves* dive. Three of us: Ian, Tim and Mike Hamilton – the heavy breathing kindergarten class you understand – left the wall at the end of this dive and noticed the guide pointing into the blue at a whale shark. We sat for a good few minutes and watched it circle us twice underwater before gently swimming off. Bit special that!

play it cool trig, play it cool

We played it fairly cool, but not as cool as we had promised each other when we got back on the boat, especially as our guide was hopping about jubilantly as he had only seen two whale sharks on the surface in six months and none under the water...ever!

We waited until the second of our group of divers, Dave Hughes, Martin Forde and Paul Nicholas (the longer lasting, less air consuming group of highly trained alpha male professionals) and guide had got back on the boat, settled and de-kitted, and started the usual description of the dive.

Yes, not bad at all really from Dave. Yes, quite shallow (8m) from Paul. A



The lads arrive in Mombasa



Tim and Ian elephant spotting

few swim throughs in the cliff face (well more collapsed caves) from Martin. Yes, we all agreed a few nice caves with lots of clams in from Ian, one even had a dead turtle in, yes we all saw the turtle (and Tim likes turtles as we all know). Yep, freshly dead actually with not many bite marks so first impressions were that it was asleep and went up to it. Paul said, “our group did that as well.”

continues on page 5

one of the top ten

SS Yongala, OZ style

Garry Beattie

Welcome to a new dive year and especially our new members, who I look forward to getting to know.

Well for some brave people the dive season has already started with the Portland 'frosties' dive in early March. Some of us even went diving, and as a bonus the fish were rather well fed. It was slightly on the chilly side!

I'd like to encourage you to get in the pool to check equipment and practice skills, and maybe visit an inland site. If you want to organise a trip then ask around...there are always others who will be interested. It is easier now, because we have Facebook and Twitter up and running alongside Yahoo Groups. Please follow us and repost, it's a great way of finding out what is going on, and attracting new members. If you need more details speak to Ruth Beattie or myself.

We are planning a number of SDCs (skill development courses) suitable for all levels. There are many ways to progress your diving other than taking the next qualification, and SDCs are one. See what is happening, or if there is something specific you would like, speak to Geoff Baker. Sue Payne has also planned a number of social events for the year and I hope you be able to join us.

This year the club is supporting the RNLI and Thames Hospicecare in its fundraising activities. We got off to a great start at the 'Ice Divers Ball', raising £745. I'd like to thank our members, and also Slough Scuba, Divestyle, Divecrew and Scimitar Diving, who gave so generously for the raffle prizes.

In April we have booked Bracknell Town Bandstand to promote the club, followed by a free try dive month in May. It would be appreciated if you can spare time to help with these activities. Speak to Ruth Beattie to offer your services.

Finally the club is run for you, the members, we need your involvement and support. We strive to be a fun club, open to all, diving for all and as Chairman I want to ensure this continues. Please talk to the committee and give us comments and ideas from places to dive to social events...and please be prepared to be roped in to helping!

I wish everyone a fantastic and safe dive season and hope to see you around.

While visiting family on the east coast of Australia in January this year it would have been rude not to attempt to dive a wreck reputed to be one of the world's best. So Ruth and I booked to dive *The Yongala* on two different dive boats, hoping that at least one would go. Just as well as the first on 'Adrenaline Divers' operating in Townsville was blown out, but the second was OK. This was with 'Yongala Divers' based at Alva beach some 50 minutes drive south of Townsville.

Getting up at 5.00am, we drove the coast road to the dive centre praying that none of the roads were flooded. Well it was the rainy season, and this was a real risk.

On arrival we were initially concerned because the dive boat turned out to be a RIB and was still on its trailer at the dive centre! After closer inspection by Ruth, cautious concern gave way to pleasant surprise as this RIB was impressive. It had proper seating for all 12 divers, had wind/sun covers, racks for all the cylinders and even an on board toilet!

RIB ride

'Yongala Divers' were very professional and a great laugh, immediately putting Ruth and I and the rest of the divers at ease. The RIB was taken to the launch site on the nearby beach with all of our gear and we all piled into a trusty 4x4 for the short journey to join it. The RIB was launched with us aboard and we



Wow, what a dive!



colourful coral covers the deck

sped off for the 30min journey to the permanently buoyed Yongala.

After a very informative but low key wreck briefing we did something we have not done for a very long time and rolled off the side of a RIB. Masks still in place, Ruth and I descended the stern mooring line and swam along the port side of the keel which lies on its starboard side at 28m.

a colourful experience

The wreck itself is colourful enough but the fish life is extraordinary! The Yongala dive crew had warned us that the fish appeared to be on steroids, due to the plentiful food supply in the water – they were not kidding, the number and size of the fish was something to behold.

Reaching the bow we started to weave our way up and down the deck back to the stern. It is illegal to enter the wreck as divers bubbles were deemed to be rotting the fabric. But to be honest the wreck was so open one did not need to enter anything.

As we had a second dive planned we decided to just get the hang of the wreck orientation and marvelled at the life sticking to the protected superstructure and within the holds. Both main masts were lying on the sea bed, even these had swarms of fish hanging under them.

We had been warned about the many sea snakes and while I was



manners please – rude turtle barges past

taking video with the wide angle lens I got a bit closer than I had wanted to with one of them, in so much that it flicked my lens with its tail.

a little bit of history

During the surface interval we were treated to wraps and fruit in the spacious RIB and were given the wreck's history by a red haired OZ lad with Scottish ancestry. He explained that *The Yongala* was built in my hometown of Newcastle during 1903 and that the owners, 'The Adelaide Steamship Company', were one of the first to install electricity on a ship. As a result it also had a fanned air conditioning system and cargo refrigeration.

It was an irony that *The Yongala* was on its way to pick up a Marconi set in Cairns. If only it had been delivered to her departing port of Melbourne, it would certainly have been warned of the 1911 cyclone that sent it and the entire ships compliment to the sea bed. Interestingly the force of the 2011 cyclone twisted the wreck further and pushed it some five metres along the sea bed and sandblasted some of the plates to clean metal.

no entry

With these stories fresh in our ears we started our second dive on the fish infested Tyneside built, special wreck. We kept to the decks this time and as



cyclone stripped life off port side

I was passing the stern hold, a very rude large hawksbill turtle barrelled past me and entered the hold. He knew full well we could not follow!

I spotted a number of the air conditioning impellers and a bottle of champagne on the sea bed and noted more than a few intact portholes still present. Ruth and I peered into one of the many deck holes, finding a pair of toilets in one.

The engine room with the large triple expansion steam engine which drove a single propeller was easy to find. The passenger walkways under the remnants of the main superstructure was tempting us for a closer inspection, but we were good little divers and, as ordered, we stayed out.

the end of the dive

Towards the end of the dive we saw 'VW', so named because this massive pacific grouper is the size of a VW beetle car. Then just as we started our ascent a huge bull shark came past, thankfully swimming away!

So ended two great dives and after a quick power drive back to the launch site, we stepped of the RIB into the shallows and returned to the dive centre for a traditional OZ barbee. A truly great days diving!

I can only add, next time you are in Australia you need to do this wreck, it's not to be missed!



Entrance to Cenote



Crystal clear...magic



Mayan culture



On the top of Coba

Mexican magic

Sarah Custerson

Last November, Raj, Tish, Pete and I went to Mexico on our hols. We wanted a holiday with diving rather than a diving holiday.

After about 20 hours of research by Tish and I and lots of haggling on cost from Raj, we chose the *Iberostar Quetzal* in Playa Car. This seemed an ideal location to cater for all our requirements and boy, did we have a list of requirements.

These ranged from being nowhere near Cancun, to being close to go diving in Cenotes and Cozumel, to being centrally located to immerse ourselves in the Mayan culture and visit the ruins of Tulum, Chichen Itza and Coba...and yes, we also needed time for relaxation and beer!

With all of that, I felt the need for a spreadsheet. I did not disappoint ;-).

caverns and caves

We booked our diving with *Dressel Divers* who were based in our hotel. They gave a 20% discount for advance booking of a package and their email correspondence appeared to be quite good and organised.

Diving the Cenotes has been on Pete's wish list for ages. These are underground caverns and caves which are known to be crystal clear because, in most cases, the water is filtered through limestone rock. They certainly exceeded my expectations.

We dived several and all were different. Ranging from wide caverns which got darker and narrower as you swam through to others where you reached an underground cave with bats. The stalactites and stalagmites

were awesome, the water so clear you felt you were in the open air and could take your reg out of your mouth and walk along the rocks. As you dive through, you sometimes came across Haloclines where salt and fresh water mix. Vision became blurry and sometimes took a while to get used to – but if you just ascended by about half a metre you were out of it.

a magical experience

As well as being clear, the water was also very cold in comparison to the warm sunlight outside and there were times when my teeth were chattering.

Your profile ranged from a depth of 15m to 10m to 3m and then back down to 10m – which did cause some problems with my ears, but we had a really good dive guide who showed me a new way to clear them. I am so glad otherwise I would have had to abort the dive.

Diving the Cenotes was a magical experience and one not to be missed. Other important information about diving in the Cenotes is the toilet facilities. Let's just say each one varies, from a proper western style toilet to a hole in the floor ;-)

bull shark adventure

The others also went bull shark diving but there was a definite "no" from me. I wished them the best of luck and asked for their insurance details. They boarded the boat apprehensively, but came back all smiles...and all fingers and toes accounted for.

They saw about eight bull sharks, one being very large which they later discovered was because she was



Setting off to dive with sharks

pregnant. Blimey diving with pregnant sharks – even madder than I thought!

further afield

We also caught the ferry to go diving in Cozumel. The swim throughs were amazing and I have never seen crabs and lobsters outside the UK before. It was definitely worth the effort of the ferry crossing as the reefs in Playa Car were not great. The area is mainly flat and sandy and ideal for sharks.

Therefore from my perspective I was happy that the more diving we did in the Cenotes, the less diving we would do in the sea.

Playa Car was an excellent location as the Cenotes were a 20 – 40 minute drive away depending on which one you went to. This then allowed you to be back in the hotel by 3pm to make use of the pool, beach and bar. It also meant that if you wanted to go as a family, your other half and children would not be left for too long on their own – always a brownie point ;-)

cultural pursuits

The trips to the Mayan ruins were brilliant. Tulum (by the sea) and Coba (in the jungle) being our favourites. We were fortunate to climb to the top of Coba, which was truly breathtaking and a memory I will never forget.

Overall, we all had a fantastic holiday and the spreadsheet, despite the mickey taking, was referred to on numerous occasions. There was something for everyone and if anyone is thinking of going, we would be happy to talk about the dive operator we used. We are now looking at booking our next trip.



a whale of a time

a Kenyan adventure

continued from front cover

Yeah we all agreed...it was not bad diving actually but not that special really...apart from that ruddy big whale shark that came round a couple of times at the end and so close we could have all pretty much touched it! Stunned silence from the A-Team. We stammered on – a fairly nice and steady dive, apart from the whale shark of course. Did we mention the whale shark? Did you guys that breathe so gently not see that then? Not sure how you could have missed it as it was so large and graceful but apparently, nope, you never saw it? Are you sure? Didn't it cruise by in Man from Atlantis mode?

"I am concussed"

Adding a slight twist to the usual holiday there were two different land based activities of note as well. The first was a two day safari to Tsavo East with an overnight stay in a lodge in the middle of the week. So many lions and elephants and a hippo or two. A rhino and leopard would have been nice but three of the big five wasn't bad. There had been a lot of rain over preceding months and as a result there were more active waterholes than normal. This meant the wildlife did not need to travel to the main waterholes to drink and were therefore harder to find.

The drive to Tsavo was interesting: the roads in Kenya at times are pretty bad. But you cannot say they don't use all of the road. On the return to Mombassa, there was a four mile queue of traffic. Our driver, Salim, first used the footpath on our side of the road and then on the other side of the road and he joined the correct lane only when he was met by three lanes of traffic coming towards him and he was on the wrong side of the road!

The second interesting twist was Tim banging his head, first on the underside of the boat – "I'm fine, it wasn't even dribbling that much when we went past the sharks". Then the blithering idiot smacked it on the drain pipe on the balcony at the hotel – quite badly – and needed expert first aid from Paul. "I am concussed!" was the excuse thereafter for just about anything.

Back for more?

Would we return, Yes, maybe even with the families as well as the hotel was lovely and ideally we would do everything the same. *Kenya Airways, Voyager Beach, Buccaneer Diving* and *F Kings Safari* and whale shark experience, but Tim doesn't fancy the bang on the head next time round. Also, just to mention that the new Olympic sport is to sneak up behind Dave, Paul or Martin and whisper very quietly "whale shark". Bit special that...but don't remind them as apparently they missed it.

a whirlwind romance

Zofia Rusilowcz

It's been three years since my first open water dive and I decided to book on a liveaboard holiday in Egypt. It was my dream from the beginning but I was worried that I would end up being seasick for six days. I can be sick even during mill pond conditions, but fortunately now receive regular shipments of 'magic pills' from Poland that do the trick.

I booked 'Wrecks and Reefs' with 'Scuba Travel' when the price dropped below £900, and it was worth every penny. I flew with 'Monarch' from Gatwick to Sharm el Sheik, then had a short coach ride to *Whirlwind*, which was moored at the Military Port.

Our boat looked impressive and very, very big from the outside, but inside it was showing its age, especially in the bathrooms. Still at least all the cabins have twin beds, while *Mistral*, the newest addition to the Tornado fleet, has bunk beds. Food was very good and plentiful, although I had hoped for more authentic, Egyptian cuisine.

wreck heaven

After the check out dive in Stingray City, the captain went straight across the Gulf of Suez to Abu Nuhas. The crossing was smooth and I was able to have a good look at all the giant ships going to the Suez Canal. We spent 3 days diving *The Barge*, *Chrisoula K*, *Carnatic* and *Gianis D*.

The *Gianis D* was a great wreck with millions of glass fish in the wheel house and many places to have a peek inside. However there was quite

a big swell and I ended up being sick in the RIB while we chased a pod of dolphins on the way back. This meant I had to miss the next dive on *The Ulysses*.

On the way back to the Sinai Peninsula we stopped at *The Rosalie Muller*. It was an early start and just ten of us went down. It is 50m to the seabed and some of the less experienced people were not allowed to dive it. Disappointingly there was very little coral or fish and visibility was quite poor at only 15m. Overall I liked all the wrecks but was missing my favourite type of diving – walls.

magical history tour

It was a rough crossing, but when *Whirlwind* moored over the *Thistlegorm*, it looked very promising... there was only one more liveaboard moored there and the day boats were returning to Sharm. A pod of dolphins came to check on us and a female turtle that lives on the wreck surfaced a few times. We later saw her sleeping during the night dive.

First dive was at 4pm, so the light wasn't the best but the *Thistlegorm* lived up to my expectations. The wreck is huge and seeing all the trucks, tyres, locomotives, boots, ammunition and guns made me feel like I was visiting a museum.

During the night dive we had to face a strong current, which combined with too many divers, made it a little hectic. One or two of my fellow divers ended up with deco and had no idea what to do with it. During the safety stop their faces seemed to say, "what are these



numbers on my computer? I've never seen them before".

The next day our guide took us on the tour through all the holds. Simply great! Then it was time to say goodbye to the wrecks and dive some reefs around Sharm.

reef result

On 'Gordon Reef' I had my perfect night dive and in just 6m of water. Firstly it was very dark, and only 3 pairs went in. Secondly, I saw a sleeping turtle and a big moray eel hiding in a crack in the reef.

During the morning dive at 'North Jackson Reef' we went looking for sharks, jumping from the RIB into the big blue. I noticed straight away a big school of confused tuna, and we all followed the guide who started swimming in their direction. Two hammerheads were hunting there, and they circled us a few times. A fantastic experience as I had seen my first sharks. Two more dives and sadly it was time to go home.

I loved the whole idea of liveaboard diving...it is so convenient, just diving and relaxing. In 2012, I hope to visit southern Egypt.

go west

Nic Hallett

After spending a 50th birthday with my family and Harry Potter in Orlando I was delighted to drive Highway 1 with my shore cover for a week of R&R. Key West is 170 miles south of Miami at the tip of the archipelago, joined by a thin concrete ribbon of road, and if Disney was to create Hippyville this would be it.

Rum bars and restaurants, Cubans and drag queens jostle in the hectic streets, and on the edge of Old Town there are two scuba hypermarkets – things are looking up. It is mid January and Wraybury is close to freezing, I need an early season warm up dive and here it is 26°C both in the water and in the sunshine plus the *USS Vandenberg* is just 40 minutes offshore so it would be a shame not to!

a bit of history

This WWII transport ship, 17,000 tonnes and 160m, ended life as a floating radar station and then sunk as an artificial reef in 2009. It still looks like a ship with just early stages of plant growth but plenty of shoaling fish life. The dive boat, 'Sea Eagle', is a 20m hard boat, twin ladders and loads of space for at least twice today's complement of ten divers plus crew. A huge forward hold provides masses of storage and

changing room with racks of kit to borrow – plus some dodgy looking heads hiding behind a billowing shower curtain.

in at the deep end

Fellow divers are either Advanced Open Water or wannabe AOW even though this is a 'deep dive' at 27m and sea spray, high up on the deck, shows that there is quite a bit of a chop. The Dive Manager admits the currents had been too strong to dive the previous day and, on arrival at the site, the good news is that the marker buoy isn't being pulled under water...quite!

A giant stride off the high gunwales and I follow the knotted rope down to 5m where we are all clinging on like washing on the line in a gale, masks vibrating as the current tries to rip them away. "Only face into the current" we have been told and it is very clear why. At 27m it is not much better and the diver in front is breathing so hard it looks like a free-flow.

high speed drift

Hugging the deck we clamber towards the bow tantalised by the fabulous superstructure, enticing swim throughs and tempting entry points but the current is too strong to go looking. Fifteen minutes into our planned twenty minutes of bottom time the three of us signal the return



Satellite dishes



On deck



We have company

and let go into a high speed drift back over the wreck.

We head for the 3m satellite dish pointing skywards and I see the monofilament approaching rapidly, try to fly over it, just as it catches on a fin buckle. Trying to reach back against the ferocious current is almost impossible but then my buddy catches up and cuts me free. Like a taut elastic I fly off again as far as the mid-ship buoy line.

adventure over

Near our deco limit and dive time my buddy's gas is also low so up we go, grimly hanging on for a safety stop otherwise we'll end up shore diving in Africa. All we have to do now is climb wearily back onto the bouncing boat ladder and swap out cylinders for the next dive...a slightly calmer Cayman Salvager just an hour away.



USS Vandenberg

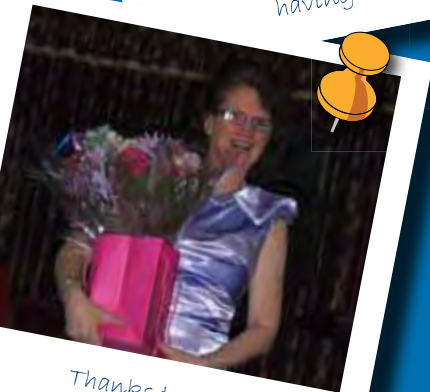
ice divers

A good time was had by all at our annual black tie dinner dance, 'The Ice Divers Ball' held at Queen Anne's Manor at the end of January.

Many thanks to Sue Payne, our Social Secretary, and all her helpers for organising. During the evening we raised £745 for RNLi and Thames Hospicecare. Thanks also to Divecrew, DiveStyle, Slough Scuba and Scimitar Diving for donating some great raffle prizes.



The Kendrick-Thomas's having a ball



Thanks to Sue for a great event



Dancing the night away

what's new?

Ruth Beattie

What's new in the club? Well love them or hate them or is that Marmite (Yuck!), social network pages have their uses. In line with BSAC itself and many other clubs we have re-established both Facebook and Twitter for our club use.

Bracknell Sub Aqua Club

Facebook group

BSAC434@groups.facebook.com

This has been set up as a totally 'Secret group' which means that only invited club members can see the content of the pages. This includes who is in the group and what is posted. It is designed to work alongside Yahoo Groups to remind the club membership of upcoming events such as dives and social functions.

May I invite you to at least take a look, and talk with Pete Custerson, Craig Edwards, Martin Hamilton or myself if you are interested or have any concerns.

The advantage of Facebook is that it is more immediate than Yahoo Groups and allows club related photos and documents to be posted.

Bracknell Sub Aqua Club

Twitter page

@bracknell434

Our Twitter account has been re-activated to act as our external announcements page – get following!

Bracknell Sub Aqua Club website

And don't forget our club website.

www.bracknellscuba.org.uk

This is both our internal and public face. It contains so much essential information about the club and our activities and is well worth taking the time to get to know.

It includes the club diary of events, upcoming training courses, as well as many useful downloads for instructors

and new club members as well as a complete *mouthpiece* archive in the resources section.

From an external point of view, the website contains all the need-to-know information about our club, equipment and costs and has attracted a number of new members to our club.

EasyFundraising

www.easypfundraising.org.uk

And finally anyone who shops online can benefit our club funds at no cost to themselves. How can this be possible? We are setting up an account with EasyFundraising who donate a percentage of your spend to clubs and charities.

There are literally thousands of well known retailers from Amazon to Zavvi, who participate in the scheme. EasyFundraising also monitor the latest voucher offers further saving you money. Looks like a win-win situation to me!

Weymouth dive club profited from this last year, and thanks to Dave Hughes and Alan Ashbery for passing this tip on. So take a look at the website and importantly watch out for the announcement when this goes live.

Free try dives in May

Following our success of last year we are repeating our 'Bandstand Promotion' on 14 April where we will offer free try dive sessions in May. So please let friends, work colleagues and relatives know about this. We will be looking for volunteers to take in the try divers and of course people to meet and greet to make our visitors feel welcome.

MANY THANKS to everyone who has contributed to this edition of *mouthpiece*. New content is always appreciated – please send to: **publicity@bracknellscuba.org.uk**