



Mick Young in Tank Cave. Photo by Sherryn Amor



C.D.A.A. Newsletter

No. 155 - MARCH 2021



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Cover:
Sherryn Amor
in Tank Cave.

Photo by
Mick Young

CAVE DIVERS ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA

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Photo by Liz Rogers

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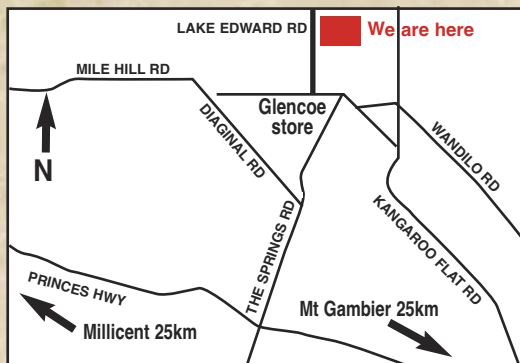
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PUBLICATIONS REPORT

MEGGAN ANDERSON



Hi members

Well the year has certainly started with some challenges, with continuing border challenges and with our back office currently being inaccessible to most officers. Regarding the back office, we hope to present options to members soon. I thank those who have joined me on meetings with potential vendors, it can be a juggle when working full time to attend meetings after hours.

I'd also like to ask members to please consider contributing to Guidelines, every quarter it is a scramble for articles and it would certainly relieve the pressure if we had more contributions coming from members. I am happy to help you put together an article if you are struggling.

The membership renewal period will start before the next issue of Guidelines and due to our system challenges I would just like to pre-warn members that there may be significant delays in processing cards this year.

In the next Guidelines we will be calling out for nominations for certain director positions, including Publications and Records. I will not be nominating for another term so if anyone is interested in nominating please get in touch with me if you want to know more about the role or have any questions.

Until next time take care.

Meg

Meggan Anderson #4942 | Publications and Records Director
M: 0415 291 904 | E: publications@cavedivers.com.au

Articles for Guidelines June 2021 - Deadline is May. 14th

- Send articles and jpeg images by email to guidelines@cavedivers.com.au

Did you know?

You can opt for an electronic copy of Guidelines rather than a paper copy. Simply login to your CDAA online account, select the dropdown menu under the My Records tab and click on Update My Details. Handy for those who have multiple CDAA members in their household or for those wanting to do their bit for the environment!

NATIONAL COMMITTEE UPDATE

MARCH 2021

January through March are traditionally some of the busiest months for the CDAA, as members take advantage of good weather and time-off work to travel and dive some of our spectacular caves. While it's certainly been a little quieter than usual for this time of year due to the lingering threat of COVID restrictions that seem to spring up at the drop of a hat, it is gratifying to have witnessed many members resuming cave diving activities with a level of enthusiasm that has been absent for far too long.

Sadly, and literally as I write this report, it has just been announced that Victoria will again be subject to another round of stage 4 COVID restrictions. There is little doubt that even tighter border closures will follow. At this point we can only hope that the latest Victorian outbreak can be contained quickly, and that this doesn't spread further and prevent our members in other parts of Australia from visiting Mount Gambier and the Nullarbor to dive.

Over the couple of months, I plan to pick up where I left off last year and continue updating the CDAA Emergency Response plans and protocols. Site Director Kelvyn Ball has been working closely with the Mount Gambier SES, and with the CDAA's growing inventory of Search and Rescue equipment (thanks to the grant we were awarded last year), it should all tie in nicely together. Thanks also needs to go ForestrySA for their support of the CDAA's upcoming on-site emergency response training and the climbing workshop and assessment conducted by Standards Director Tim Featonby earlier in the year.

As members have been informed via some of the email bulletins that have gone out recently, the EOL of the Flash plugin has limited the number of office bearers who can access the online CDAA Admin portal, which is responsible for managing all of the CDAA's back-end member functions,

from member documents, site bookings, indemnities etc. Thank you to the members who have heeded our requests and provided plenty of lead time when submitting bookings and member documents for approval – it is very much appreciated. This is not a “forever” issue - Publications Director Meg Anderson, and Business Director Mary-Anne McLeod have been putting in a tremendous amount of work towards the long-term upgrade of the CDAA website and supporting systems. In the meantime we need to continue to work with what we've got.

Unfortunately, despite our requests, we still seem to be receiving numerous “night before” dive bookings. While we do our very best to approve all bookings, we are not at our computers 24/7 – and our reduced access to the Admin portal means that late bookings may not get approved. In the event that you need to change your diving arrangements at the last minute – please send myself or Kelvyn a text message to let us know. If possible, we will do our best to get your bookings sorted – but there are no guarantees. All members need to be aware – if your booking is not approved – you should not dive – no exceptions. Here's hoping that the current resurgence of COVID outbreaks is short-lived, and 2021 is a better year for all of us!

Peter Wolf
CDAA National Director

*On behalf of the
National Committee*



Mary-Anne McLeod,
Business Director



Kelvyn Ball,
Site Director



Tim Featonby,
Standards Director



Meggan Anderson,
Publications and
Records Director

BUSINESS REPORT

MARY-ANNE MCLEOD



2021 could not have come around fast enough. With a relaxing of border restrictions (well for a while) we saw many divers from the Eastern states being able to finally get back in the caves, but last minute border changes did mean a few planned trips were cancelled. I was very fortunate to get 5 days diving in after new year's and it was good, really good.

Much of the last quarter has been taking up assessing options for the required overhaul of our CDAA back office system. These will provide greater efficiency and ease of use for both our volunteers and the members, but there is significant cost involved. As we progress through quotes we will be putting the favoured options to the members.

If you are after new merchandise, please keep an eye out, we will be organizing another bulk order.

As announced in the September 2020 edition, CDAA were very pleased to be awarded a grant from ADSF for \$15,000 on equipment to support cave rescues. Harry has now ordered and received the majority of the equipment. Thanks once again to both Harry and ADSF.

You may have also seen that OzTek have made the difficult decision to postpone the conference, which will be held in Melbourne, until 2022. We have booked a stall and can't wait to finally be there again.

We do seem to have continual border interruptions, I hope those that are not able to get to Mount Gambier are at least able to enjoy some local diving.

Mary-Anne McLeod #5011
Business Director

STANDARDS REPORT

TIM FEATONBY



All quiet on the southeastern front. Hello and I hope you all have had a great Christmas and New Years.

Many of us have been locked out and had plans change several times over the last few months with borders opening and closing. We did manage to get four members together to run a vertical access course in Mt Gambier in January. We finished with a clean up dive in Hells Hole rappelling in and prusiking out. We managed to pull several bags of bottles, metal and cans. Don't worry there is still a lot of garbage left for next time as well as a couch that was too large for the small group.

We plan to run another course in NSW shortly as well as more in Mt Gambier throughout the year.

I am also looking to run some mapping training over the year for our members, with the hope that we can update some of our maps and improve our understanding of our caves. Lastly I am pleased to advise that we have two new instructors undergoing training. We are looking for more. If anyone is currently a dive instructor and would like to pass on their cave diving experience to new divers please contact me to discuss the possibilities of becoming a CDAA instructor.

Stay safe (by following the rules) and hope to see many of you in the water this year.

Tim Featonby #3372
Standards Director



Hope everyone has enjoyed their Christmas and New Year as best as they could with all the COVID19 regulations still floating around. Even better if you got a few dives in too. As I am writing this, looks like Melbourne has been hit again and once again some Victorian divers' travels will be restricted unfortunately. We can only hope that things clear up quickly. During the New Year break I had a quick catch up with a few landowners.

The Shaft – is still currently closed.

Ela Elap – is also currently closed due to an insurance issue so the owner has temporarily closed it. We are currently trying to reorganise it to reopen asap.

Kilsby – as of March they have increased the price of time slots. \$30 per 2 hour time slot and entry is reverting back to 30 mins before slot and to exit the front gates of the property within 30 mins of end of time slot.

Hancocks – I have met with the new owner group and they have assured me that nobody ever will dive this site again. It is a corporately owned and they want to assume no risk for their property. So unfortunately, this site looks to be closed until any new ownership takes place in the future.

Englebrechts – Closed for maintenance Feb 8 to Feb 16, 2021.

Tank Cave – hoping a few jobs get finalised if the border stays open to me this year. Fingers crossed. Infrastructure to get water available. Unfortunately the neighbours are not using the tank anymore so we need to organise to get pumps etc for water supply.

Pines – is going to open up to am and pm slots and we are working on a single CDAA fee that will cover all instructors when running a course in this site.

I recently attended a SES Meeting in Mount Gambier to give a short description of our cave rescue course. The SES were extremely interested in what we do and a great amount of advice/info was exchanged. I got a lot of insight out of it and I believe they did too. This has now lead up to the CDAA and SES combining to do a training day, which will involve a mock rescue out at Hells Hole. This will be a great experience to see the SES and the CDAA working together.

Hope to see you all out and about diving somewhere soon.

Kelvyn Ball
Cheers Kelvyn Ball – Site Director

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Sharing Our World

Story and photos by Meg Anderson

I scroll way too much on Facebook. And when I scroll if I see a competition that only requires you to comment with your name, I'm in. Before the pandemic, I won a free snorkel tour in Kilsbys thanks to my Facebook scrolling. Now while I love Kilsbys as much as anyone and the idea of only carrying snorkel gear down there instead of dive gear appealed to me, I figured my prize would be far more exciting for someone who had never been. Enter Mara. Mara and I used to work in the same office (oddly enough I recently got moved to the office Mara works in now). Not many people in my life outside of cave diving are remotely interested in hearing about my hobby. They don't even pretend to be interested (although with the Thai cave rescue they might have feigned interest for 5 minutes). However one person who has always been interested is Mara. Whenever I walked past Mara's pod she'd holler: "Meg when are you taking me cave diving?" Numerous times I tried to explain to her I wasn't an instructor and maybe she should consider open water training first. But Mara kept asking. So when I won the Kilsbys competition, I asked if I could give the prize to a friend and they agreed. And the lucky winner was Mara.

Enter the pandemic. Months pass. I get moved to the office where Mara is now. And I start saying to her, time to cash in the prize. She is keen to see more of Mount Gambier and wants to go for a long weekend. So I offer to come down for a bit and

show her around. She is also bringing Meryl from her mountain biking group, who is from Singapore and hasn't seen any of regional South Australia. I have given a list of things to do to quite a few non-diving visitors to Mount Gambier so I came up with



Little Blue packed on a hot day.



Mara and Meryl check out Pines – I missed the pink shirt memo.



Fossil Cave.

a couple of potential sightseeing ideas for the weekend. I got down earlier so I could fit in a dive at Tank on the Saturday morning and met Mara and Meryl at their caravan park accommodation near the Blue Lake afterwards. After lunch in town, I showed them the Cave Gardens and then we visited Pines. On the way to Pines we were lucky to see a group of emus cross the road. After Pines I asked whether they were happy to keep looking at caves and they were keen to continue. So we headed to Nettlebed and Mud Hole and they were very excited that there were divers there because they wanted to watch them get in. A local family were also there having a look and started asking me questions about cave diving. I answered questions like how long they can dive in the cave for, what's to see etc. And then the usual explanation about it being air in the tanks, not oxygen. The divers, CDAA members April Zhao, Andrew Hebbard and Shane Callaway were very patient as Mara and Meryl looked at their gear, asked questions and took photos (Meryl's comment: They look like astronauts!). We were also lucky to see a wallaby. After that we went to Fossils (and the wildlife continued with a mouse spot-

April Zhao getting into Nettlebed.



Shane Callaway getting into Nettlebed.



Andrew Hebbard getting into Nettlebed.



ting). Through talking with Meryl, I learn that she is an ecologist so that is why she is really enjoying looking at the caves. Unfortunately because of COVID rules we couldn't stop by Tank so we stopped by Little Blue. It's a hot day so it is packed with locals and tourists and we were entertained by them cliff jumping into the water. We had time to do one more thing before dinner so we headed off to Umpherston Sinkhole. There were many tourists there and the possums had come out early. After that we headed for dinner at The Barn.

I had to head back early to Adelaide the next day so I leave Mara and Meryl a list of other worthwhile tourist sites and Mara also still had her snorkel tour coming up (which she really enjoyed). I followed their activities on Facebook when I got home and they packed a lot in! Tours at Engelbrechts and Tantanoola, wine tasting, having a look at Ewens and Pics, lunch at Port Mac, they even crossed the border and popped in at Nelson! Needless to say when I saw Mara back at work she was quite exhausted.

I had a lot of fun showing my friends around and upon reflection and think they got great value from an actual cave diver taking them on a tour of some of the sites and talking about what we do there and answering their questions. If you're ever travelling down to Mount Gambier with a non diver be sure to ask around about things they can do so they don't get bored while you're diving – there's more to the Mount Gambier region than just cave diving! But then again they may be genuinely interested in seeing what we do – just be sure to check each site's access rules regarding visitors.



A wallaby at Nettlebed and Muthole.

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How I learnt to dive in caves and climbed out of Hell's Hole

By Genrikh Salata

My cave diving journey can be summed up in three words: terrifying, challenging and extremely rewarding. I think it is fascinating how people manage to push the envelope of what is possible and inevitably improve their mental as well as physical capabilities.

There is no better motivation to do these things than being in an entirely different world where you explore the landscape and space that no one else gets to see. There is no space for politics, egos and if anything it makes you realise your humbleness fairly quickly. So, let me tell you what it was like for me as I dipped my toes into this world. My first taste of cave diving took place at Burrinjuck Dam with my dive buddy Rickard du Rietz and under the supervision of Tim Featonby. At that stage I had about 80 dives in open water. I always wanted to be a little better at it and practiced various things relatively often (e.g. swapping regulators, flooded masks, buoyancy, frog kicks, etc.). It was shocking how quickly things came undone during a stress test – below is a list of things that I will avoid doing at all cost:

- Clipping your main reel to the bungee cord of your short hose regulator.
- Seemed like a cool idea at the time to assist with tie-offs, not so cool if you share air without a mask while desperately trying to find the long hose 2nd stage.
- Grabbing the area around my right armpit in hope of finding that 2nd stage, instead of doing a systematic search.
- To cut to the chase, I never managed to find the D-ring and the long hose regulator while sharing air on the short hose (and trying to get the bloody reel out of the way every time).
- Not being comfortable/well-practised with my gear and set-up.
- Don't drop the regulator while buddy breathing – the consequences are easy to predict.



The only way to get better is through practice, so I kept going. The whole purpose of training is to experience messy situations in a controlled environment and learn how to avoid and/or resolve 'self-induced surprises' underwater. The very best gift for 2021 was three weeks of diving in Mt Gambier where I continued working on my cave diving certification. I did over 30 dives in caves and caverns where I learnt how easy it is to make a mistake and how hard it gets things back under control. Let's recap of the most memorable moments:



- Line before gas.
- Don't go under the line – bad things can / will happen.
- Expect your buddy to be in just as much or more trouble than you.
- I still remember having a go at my buddy for not being able to get me out of entangled line when I put it around my torch in out of air simulation (line first, right?). Rickard kindly pointed out that he also had no mask, which made me reflect on my ability to communicate underwater.
- I rushed things and didn't have the capacity to interpret the situation and come up with a better response.
- Long hose can mysteriously become significantly shorter when navigating tight passages.
- Some smart manoeuvring is necessary to prevent a situation where you get constantly hit by the fins, while your buddy can't move forward because that's the max length of the hose.
- Did you ever roll-up the reel in counter-clockwise direction?
- I did, looks ugly when anyone else uses it. Turn handle to the right – line goes everywhere... it's hard to sort 2-3 meters of loose/entangled line underwater.
- Long hose will entangle on a log or other things when you least expect it.
- Cheap swivels will fail and bleed your air - don't try to save money by buying Chinese imitations from Adreno.

I hope this gives a gist of it from a newbie perspective. I'm chuffed to have my Cave Diving qualification dated 1 January 2021. I can say with most certainty that this is that this is the best personal development and learning experience I've ever had. I wish my research, work or gliding adventures provided the same level of mentoring, camaraderie and support. I'm looking forward to more underwater adventures and meeting other members of the cave diving community. Anyone joining the SRT training/practice at Jervis Bay?

P.S. A quick disclaimer about the title – the learning never stops. :)

New dates for OZTek OZDive Expo '22

Unsurprisingly, OZTek Advanced Diving Conference and OZDive Expo have been postponed.

2020 was a tough year for everyone and sadly, it looks like we'll still be globally sorting ourselves out in 2021.

In order to provide the absolute BEST possible event, it was decided postponement was the most realistic option. As of today, Australian international borders remain closed and even within Australia, it is difficult to travel. COVID has placed us all in a constant cycle of border closures and lockdowns. In this environment, it makes it impossible to hold our usual beloved OZTek & OZDive.

It took a while to find a new date (weirdly, we're not the only ones postponing!!) but have settled on Oct 1-2, 2022.

Note: Please be aware this is a long weekend for QLD, ACT, NSW and SA (not VIC, TAS, NT or WA). So, if you are planning to travel to Melbourne for the event, you may have an extra day up your sleeve.

Be sure to mark it in your 2022 diary.

Not Everything Has Changed!

OZTek and OZDive Expo '22 will still be held at the Melbourne Conference & Exhibition Centre (Jeff's Shed) on October 1st and 2nd, 2022 - the very start of the Australian diving season.

Expectation is building; we're all keen for a bit more normality. "Divers tell me they want a real live, ridgy-didge, face-to-face event where everyone can meet, talk, swap ideas and socialise," says Sue Crowe. "We will also include the OZTek-TV and virtual hybrid component."

"MCEC has rolled out the welcome mat and continues to be very supportive in light of these trying times. It has been a tough time for them too. It's tough for everyone."

The combination of the traditional OZTek Conference, alongside the updated OZDive Expo will bring together divers from all over Australia like never before.

Block the new 2022 dates (OCT 1-2, 2022)

& bookmark the website as we work towards making this a truly jaw-dropping event.

<https://oztek.com.au>

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Pic: Alison Perkins. OZTek2019 Marine Diver Category

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Falling in Love with Tulum, my workplace and my home.

By Julia Gugelmeier - www.cavedivingtulum.com • Intro by Dave Bryant

In May 2017 my wife and I visited Tulum before spending two weeks in Cuba. We are both Open Water divers and were made aware that in Tulum we could access certain dive sites but we would need to hire a guide. After a bit of internet investigation I chanced upon Julia. Her qualifications and local knowledge gave me every reason to rely on her service and professionalism.

Once in Tulum Julia met with us to check our certifications and the next day we dived Casa Cenote and Carwash. Later we also met Julia for dinner at a local restaurant to thank her for the 'locals' experience. Earlier this year I messaged Julia and asked if she would contribute a story about her life in Tulum, living and working with her partner Tom St George and how she has come to fall in love with Tulum.

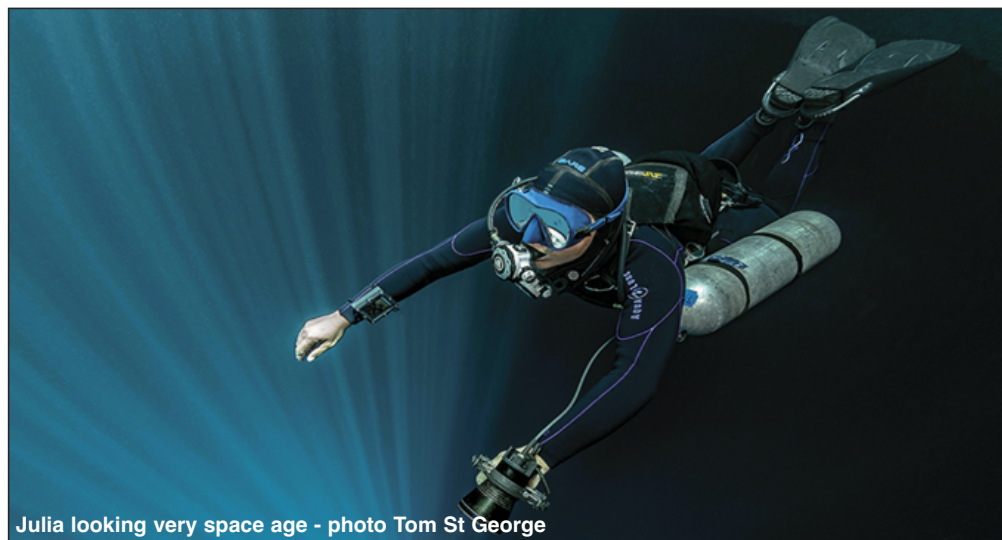
I guess, the reason we came to Tulum is a long story...

Tom and I had an amazing season diving, working and training in Mabul, Borneo in winter 2011. Mabul is a little island in the Celebes sea off of the coastal town Semporna in the province of Sabah, Malaysia.

On the continental shelf, this region with its many

islands and little atolls is part of the Coral Triangle and has the highest concentration of Malaysian coral reefs and maximum marine species diversity worldwide.

The reason, people usually heard of Mabul is because of its proximity to Sipadan, the famous oceanic island rising up 600m from the deep sea with all its stunning corals, crazy abundance of life and water that



Julia looking very space age - photo Tom St George

looks like someone poured ink into it. Mabul is the stepping stone to these famous divesites with many dive resorts.

Of course, Tom and I went there to see Sipadan, the Turtles, Sharks, Pelagics, Corals and the Depth. We frankly did not care much about the brownish/greenish reefs with little murky water and all the little critters close to Mabul. We wanted to see the big stuff. A little disappointed about not being able to jump right in and guide every day in Sipadan we sucked it up and started guiding the local reefs. It is not necessarily 'pretty diving' around Mabul, but my... did we find cool stuff! Especially the local dives closest to shore or under the jetties of the resorts were the best.

Take a fish ID book of the Coral Triangle or Southeast Asia, go on any picture of something weird or where you can't see the fish in it because it is just so well camouflaged... that's what we were looking for and finding in this area. We could spend hours in the sand / muck and got surprised with something incredible and new each day. So, we have been quite spoiled divewise, have encountered, found and seen the craziest, most beautiful and amazing Seacreatures from tiny little Macro to big Pelagic sealife. All within a 30 minute boat ride

IT'S AMAZING WHERE LIFE TAKES YOU

After having raised the question, where we would spend the next winter, we obviously were rather worried that every location after diving Mabul, Kampalai and Sipadan would be a let down. There were a few hints that I did not pick up though... we worked with this couple who were cave divers from Mexico, customers told us about the Cenotes and my friend Kay talked about going to Tulum and learning to cave dive. Mexico has been around us randomly for a while but what really had the coin drop was a film, not kidding, not even a good one but after watching it was clear that we had to go and learn cave diving.

After a summer working in Europe to finance the

Mexico trip we finally arrived here in Tulum. We planned on staying over the winter before I had to go back to Germany to my normal job, about six months in Mexico was the plan.

Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula is a limestone platform with thousands of sinkholes called Cenotes. The Cenotes on the Caribbean coast give access to some of the longest water filled cave systems in the world. The longest cave system is at the moment Sistema Sac Aktun just around Tulum with 369 kilometers of explored and surveyed cave passage. In total we have currently just over 1600 kilometers of water filled caves in Quintana Roo and exploration is ongoing. Lots of diving to do!

According to our friend Kay, who came half a year earlier, Tulum was THE place to be for the caves. A little village on the Caribbean coast of the Yucatan Peninsula, about one and a half hours south of Cancun and the cave capital of the world.

Tom started diving with our friend Kay a lot and I was cavern guiding for a dive shop in town. On my off days Tom showed me the dives they did. Over time we got quite some cavern and cave dives in and started now really enjoying this. And how could you not... it is unbelievable!!!

NEW GEAR

Kaye also hooked us up with an amazing team of the best instructors and that's how our cave journey began. First action was reviewing our equipment and, oh my... we thought we were so well equipped, we even paid a fortune for excess luggage to bring everything here! It was the first time ever I showed up with all my own dive gear, my whole pride, a set of Mares Ruby Yoke regulators and a newish Scubapro Master Jacket in red (!) from the 80's with glow-in-the-dark reflector stripes, so cool, a 3mm wetsuit, great for travelling Cressi fins, boots, mask, snorkel and my Suunto Gecko, yay.



Background image: incredible panorama
in Cenote Kukulkan, Puerto Aventuras.
Photo Tom St George

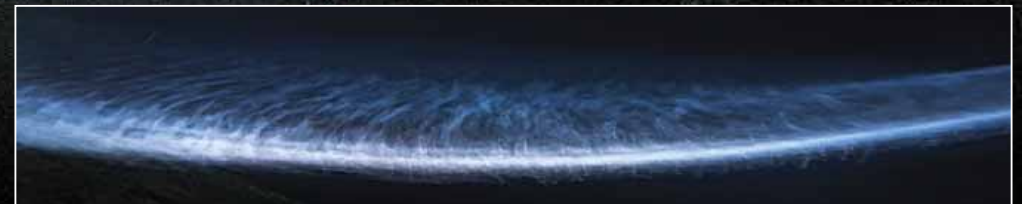


Guiding divers from all over the world.
Photo by Miranda Laurion.

A cavern tour in the Cenote Ponderosa. Photo Tom St George



Hydrogen sulphide cloud. Photo Julia Gugelmeier.



Tom also came with his full set of Open Water Gear including a shorty. After the review with our Instructor we were left with boots, fins and a mask. Good that we did that gear review a couple of days before the course started, that gave us enough time to go shopping. I really wished we hadn't spent so much money for the excess luggage right there and then...

Along the way it turned out there were more things we didn't know about... The most noticeable one was: We were not as good as we thought we were. We thought, we'd seen it all, done it all and were quite awesome actually only to learn we were embarrassingly overwhelmed if someone put a reel in our hands or we had to do a valve shut down or simply added a single task on top of diving.

NEW LEARNING

So, there we were, 500 dives under our belts and we finally started learning and understanding the basics of scuba diving: buoyancy, trim and propulsion. That helped a lot!

Being emotionally so exposed in the training also was something I did not get used to easily, but our instructors had a great time pushing us to the edge

and pressing our buttons.

Another big lesson was learning how quickly things can go terribly wrong. The consequences of mistakes could be gravely bad, to say the least. I always thought, bad things happen to other people and still felt invincible until the accident analysis class in the course. In this lesson you try to retrace the steps that led to an accident where people possibly lost their lives by making for example a navigational error. It is so easy to say, oh, what were they thinking, I would never do that, if you hear a story of something going wrong. There was something about understanding, that people are not stupid and don't choose to die, that shook me to the core. Something in the chain of events made these people think that they chose the right response to a problem and it turned out to be the wrong one. Damn. It finally taught me a lot of respect for the caves and I dare to say cured me of my quite daredevil attitude. I think, it changed even my every day life.

So, long story short, the course challenged us a lot but was also of course super much fun and helped us growing as divers and also as a couple. All in all it was awesome!



Grand Cenote, Tulum. Photo Tom St George

CAVERNS & CAVES

Tom started diving with our friend Kay a lot and I was cavern guiding for a dive shop in town. On my off days Tom showed me the dives they did.

Over time we got quite some cavern and cave dives in and started now really enjoying this. And how could you not... it is unbelievable!!!

It starts with the caverns. A cavern is the entrance area of a cave, within the daylight zone, maximum 60m distance to the surface, with a permanent guideline and no restrictions. Here in Mexico you can dive a cavern with an Open Water Certification plus a local cavern guide, who must be at least a Dive Master and a Full Cave Diver.

I really fail to describe what it is like to fly in the crystal clear water along ancient spaces past stalactites and stalagmites, through celestial sunbeams, down crazy deep pits with trippy haloclines and mesmerising gas clouds. I will come back to the gas clouds in a little bit, I am quite obsessed with them as of late. It is insane and for me the most beautiful dives I have ever done. And I get to do them every day, lucky me! Turns out, they get better with each dive too :)

Beyond the daylight zone are the caves with a variety that is incomprehensible. Pretty white caves,

gloomy dark stained by tannic acid ones, big power caves, windy twisty tunnels, small caves, huge formations, highly decorated passages, insanely fragile fine formations, massive bedding planes, cracks, breakdowns, sediment, tannic domes with almost, zero visibility passages, hydrogen sulfide clouds that form swirls, layers, waves, drops and have almost crystal like structures, still haloclines (the border between fresh and salt water) with such a high salinity gradient that it almost feels like you are dipping in oil, haloclines where high water flow makes it look like a stormy wavy ocean of just blue. I haven't even mentioned fire pits from ancient civilisations living down there once it was still dry, ochre mines, bones of extinct animals, paw prints and sacrificial pottery. I will need several lifetimes to see this all.

Six months in Mexico came and went and we had no intention of going anywhere.

TOM & HIS EXPENSIVE TOYS AND LIFE AS A PART-TIME MODEL

Tom used to have a little compact camera from when he started dive travelling but it did not do the trick in a cave. Next Christmas present was a GoPro and we filmed and tried ourselves out in editing for



Modelling for a photographer Irena Stangierska in Hells Bells, Puerto Morelos

a while. Some video lights here and there upped the game but things really changed when Tom bought his first real Camera, housing and strobes. When Tom and I were free we'd go for a dive to take pictures. Looking back now it is amazing how quick he progressed. Tom researched the hell out of cameras, photography, underwater photography, lighting and so on and I was amazed how quickly he got so good. He has such an immense talent, technical knowledge and, I guess, just the eye... I am a try-outer and would probably spend 5 dives to try something new and have mixed results, Tom researches it, tries it and usually nails it. He had to invent a whole new sign language to communicate where to position, in which angle and where to point the light, or which light effect to use were all things that needed to be said underwater. It was a bumpy process, not always fun but now it pays off. The signals work and we are tuned in quite well and it often just takes a look or a light movement to get the information and directions across. It is super interesting to see what Tom sees in a cave. A cave is a cave, right? But he'd stop at a spot that I would have just swum through, places some lights, takes some test shots and ends up with beautiful shots that are out of this world. So

remarkable and mind-blowing. I love the caves that he sees. Tom's pictures started getting a lot of attention and people all over the world have seen his stunning shots of Mexico's caverns and caves. I think, diving with Tom and hence ending up in a lot of the pictures also helped me with my own diving. It is astonishing how you so not look like you think you look or hold yourself or kick and unless you see yourself you'd never believe it. Yep, been there, done that.

A MEMORABLE DAY

Last Christmas was super special to me. I went with Martin Broen & Tom, 2 outstanding underwater photographers on a cave shoot. I was modelling and they were taking turns with lighting and taking pictures. It was so great to hear both their briefings, see their set ups, their scouting and see them work underwater. Same location, same model, entirely different styles and shots.

A great opportunity showed itself to me along the way when I was able to work as a safety diver on Ballantine's STAY TRUE with Benjamin Von Wong. Basically a company offered a photographer the opportunity to take the picture of his dreams and a film team would document the process. That's a

dream come true for me. Working with absolute great people on a fun and exciting project and being paid for it, yessss. I come from the German film industry and still love and miss the process of a whole team going all in to make a film happen, but seeing all this come together underwater was mind-blowing and entirely new to me. This project gave me a kick in a whole new direction to combine my old job with my new life and I haven't stopped thinking about ways showing this hidden world down there to everyone up here. My friendship to Rob Franklin, an absolute star as a person, the camera man on the project and my mentor on a film I am making at the moment also resulted from this project.

PROJECTS TAKING SHAPE

we were so excited and looking forward to being part of a National Geographic project in the Tulum area and then Covid happened. We were so bummed. Mexico went into lockdown like the rest of the world, but we had the best medicine ever: We would sneak out into the jungle and dive. I feel almost guilty to say it but we had a great time! Since June we are open for business and after some more quiet month business did come back with quite a vengeance. We are almost as busy as any

other year. There are obviously safety measures in place like the number of passengers in the car is restricted, everybody wears facemasks, your temperature is being taken upon entry everywhere, tests are available at every corner but apart from that, life is almost normal here. Everything is open and the diving is as incredible as always.

AND SO, LIFE GOES ON IN TULUM

Living in Tulum is easy. The climate is tropical, temperatures are usually in their high 20ies all year round, with a muggy, rainy season from May to October and a cooler, relatively dry season from November to April. The beaches are fantastic, Caribbean blue ocean and white coral sand. The people living here make it super special to us, and the food is absolutely great!

Even if it were not such an awesome place to live, the caves here would make it worth while a million times over.

For people visiting there is plenty of things to do: There are the Mayan ruins of Tulum on the beach, the biosphere reserve Sian Ka'an just down the coast for amazing wildlife tours, countless Cenotes to swim in, tours to the ancient city of Chichen Itza or the smaller Coba ruins and numerous Cenote



Where to next? Nariz, Tulum. Photo Tom St George



Julia on lighting at Cenote Angelita, Tulum. Photo Tom St George

Theme Parks... and fantastic diving of course! The little town is growing up as we speak, it has been buzzing and growing continuously and is in fact quite busy right now.

I love my work, but in 2020 post-lockdown I got to do the things I can often not find the time for when I am busy. A whole new diving era began for me. We hiked and explored a little, mapped, fun dived sooo much with my cave buddy Tam, started a cave cartography project and I got totally obsessed with hydrogen sulfide and am taking every opportunity I get to take pictures of these trippy gas clouds. I really hope Dave Bryant adds one of my pictures to this article, too :) And I am working on a cool little film that I hope to release next September.

If I am not diving with Tom I keep developing my own business guiding and teaching in Tulum's ocean, caverns and caves and working on my cave instructor rating. I count myself lucky to enjoy every

single dive like the very first one and my favourite dive is always the last one. I have a fantastic mix of guest and students from private divers to group travel trips and amazing photographers from all over the world.

It is actually quite easy: My day is perfect if you had your mind blown. I am taking it almost personal if you didn't.

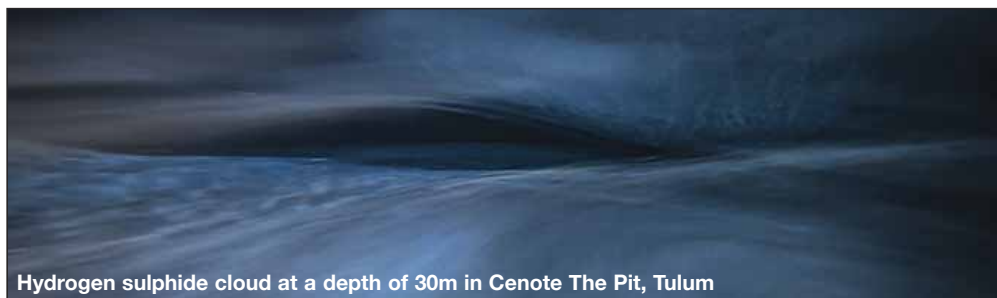
In April, so Covid will, I am part of a super exciting project, the Xunaan Ha expedition. An all female cave exploration project under the jungles of Tulum. I am so very proud to be part of this project and can't wait to meet and reconnect with the badass dive-women who will join the expedition too.

I am looking forward to all the amazingness life is throwing at us.

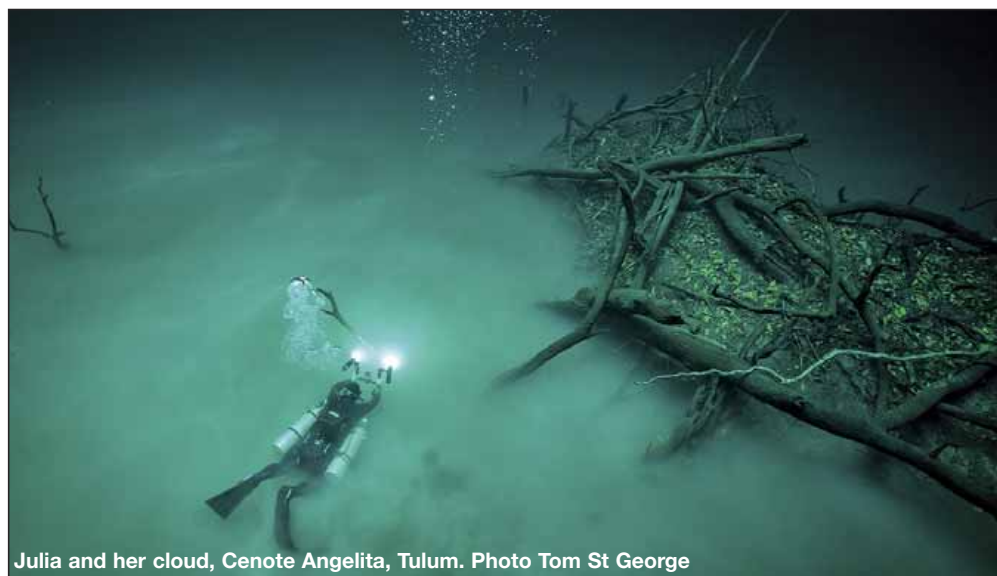
See you in Tulum!... <https://cavedivingtulum.com>

Email me anytime:

julia@cavedivingtulum.com



Hydrogen sulphide cloud at a depth of 30m in Cenote The Pit, Tulum



Julia and her cloud, Cenote Angelita, Tulum. Photo Tom St George



Julia reeling out a jump in Jailhouse, Tulum



Diving makes you hungry and the diversity of food in Tulum is great!



Tom & Julia

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DPV Cave in Tulum

Photos and story by Pierre Constant - www.calaolifestyle.com

Tulum had changed a lot since I last was there, well over 45 years ago. Once a mere dusty village with beach huts, it had turned into a booming town with a main avenue full of bars, restaurants and tourist shops. Turning the wheel right at a crossroad, a loudspeaker was blaring a warning message straight out of a science fiction movie: "Precaucion, you are entering a highly dangerous zone...". It mentioned clearly the alert level of Covid-19. I found 'Protec Dive Centre' and the 'Basecamp' towards the end of Avenida Satellite. "Oh, we have had this scary recorded message for months now, nobody pays attention anymore. That is pathetic!", said Kim, the Director of Customer Experience.

Starting with a mutual introduction, Kim went into the theory of DPV, the equipment and a workshop where I had a close look at the Polish made 'Seacraft DPV', an elongated round nose rocket type of machine, with a propeller inside a metal ring, two handles as expected in a scooter and an electronic dashboard with lights and numbers. A rather impressive piece of equipment,

for a neophyte like me. "A sophisticated toy worth no less than US\$8000 to US\$9000...", concludes Kim. I was definitely eager to know how it worked and to understand the concept of 'tow behind'.

Basically, the DPV is electronically charged by a powerful battery that can last up to 4 hours of run time. When you turn the switch on, the screen lights up and you see the percentage of the battery charge in the lower right corner. The two little buttons - one above the other in a vertical sense - are the gears: up and down, when pressed. In the lower left corner of the screen, you see the 'Speed indicator', that goes from 1 to 9 and even to the 'R' position, that goes for reverse. Next to it, you have the 'Run time'. An

average speed would be 4 to 5, fast is 6 to 7, and 9 is crazy fast. 10 speed altogether, including the reverse speed. The trigger is found on the handles, on both the left and right sides. "And that little piece of loop bungy here is for the cruise control, and it will maintain the chosen speed at all times", he smiles. I begin to feel the thrill of it all. Either good or bad, depending on your mood and mental state!

Creaky...

Getting some picnic on the way, we are off to Carwash cenote.

Once underwater, I cannot manage to hold the DPV steady. As soon as I press the trigger, it points its nose up each and every time, like a bucking horse.

Overwhelmed with a feeling of frustration, it is not as easy as I thought. After a while of me trying desperately with

no improvement whatsoever, the instructor's annoyance is palpable. Suddenly, as we surface, he makes it clear that it is not too late to give up on the course. In short, he suggests that I could quit if I chose to. Surprised, I take it as an insult. "You should be neutrally buoyant!", advises Kim. In short, if the scooter points up, you are negatively

buoyant; if it points down, you are positively buoyant. "Do not manhandle the DPV, let it pull you!". "Always remember: Buoyancy, trim, position, Action"...



Land owner at Choj Ha cenote, near Xcan

Eventually, I make the necessary corrections and it works better. Different skills are practiced, like changing hands when holding the scooter, deflating, clipping the torch on the back D-ring, on and off. We drive around the pond a few times at speed 4, turning, changing directions sharply, changing speed, stopping abruptly and pulling the DPV backwards to hold it by the front handle. After 1h30 in the water, I start feeling a bit cool.

Back at Protec's office in Tulum for a compulsory debriefing. Kim shows me the Go Pro videos of my evolution underwater. It turns out that a number of necessary adjustments are needed on my gear and harness. The waist D-ring should be moved further back, roughly above the hipbone. I should have separate bungies to hold the valves of the sidemount tanks, instead of one continuous bungy running from one side to the other side along the shoulder blades. Finally, the tank rings holding the clips should be moved further up. The whole process would first allow a better trim of the tanks along the sides. Second, the tank valves would come below the armpits to facilitate greater ease of movement for the arms in front of the body. I suddenly grasp the evidence of all these key adjustments. At the



The Mayan ruins on the seashore, Tulum



Pierre and Kim after the dive, Nohoch Nah Chich

end of the day, a personal configuration is upmost important.

Day two. The theory in the classroom starts with the history of DPV, followed by 'Gas consumption'. The traveling distance is affected by the breathing and therefore implies gas management. The fact is that the swim time is 3 times greater than the DPV time. Back in 1984, the Tekna DPV had a burn time of 60 minutes. Nowadays, the 'Seacraft' burns for 4 hours. Realistically, what is the point of penetrating very far into a cave, if you cannot come back? Either because you run out of air or what if the DPV fails for any obscure reason? The awareness strikes me between the eyes. Can I make it back from the far end? If the DPV fails, I will need 3 times as much to return swimming... Planning accordingly leaves no other option. 35 Bars on the trigger equals a 105 Bars swim. Should one use half the stage for penetration before dropping it, one should use 1/4 of the sidemount tanks after. Alternatively, using 1/3 of the stage, means using 1/3 of the sides after. It is therefore necessary to consider the total amount of gas, and divide it by 3 for penetration.

Afternoon, we shall dive Cenote Cristal. A Maya

family with kids is having some fun playing in the water. With all our equipment, we look like monsters from outer space. Laying down the tanks and the gear on the wooden steps, we take a lot of space. The kids move shyly to the sides, staring with curiosity.

I have to practice the drop and retrieve of the DPV on the line. The tow cord has to be clipped first, followed by the nose clip of the DPV, with a double twist. We enter the cavern for a while, lay the DPV on the line, retrieve it and exit. Eventually, Kim leaves me to drive the scooter alone around the cenote, for comfort, while he reels back the line. Another 1h30 session in the water, I fared better today with buoyancy control and the effortless pull of the DPV. At a local fruit stall in town, Kim treats me to an 'Agua de Maracuya' (Passionfruit water), next to a small park. A big orange signboard reads: 'Obligatorio uso de cubre boca - Mantenga su distancia - Sandwich de jamon y queso M\$20' (Face mask compulsory- Keep your distance- Cheese and ham sandwich M\$20).

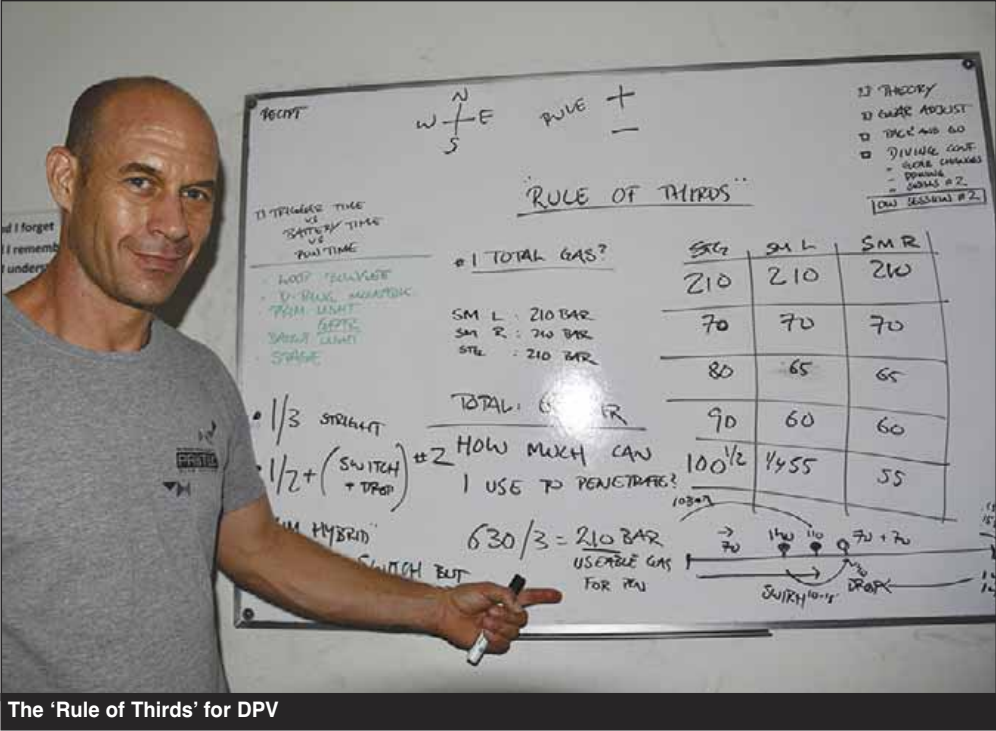
Kim shows me the video of my new trim on his cell phone, with position of the tank valves under the

armpits, tanks aligned to the body. I am filled with contempt. With Tulum's city lights along Satelite Avenue, a peaceful seafood dinner at 'Mil Amores' restaurant and a 'cerveza' Modelo Especial, will seal the evening.

The classroom session will be short. The theme we are looking at today is the 'Surface Air Consumption'. The chosen site is Nohoch Nachich, a beautiful cave with a long ornated tunnel. Different case scenarios will be studied and analyzed. First a swim with sidemount configuration over a distance of 15 minutes in (and 15' out). Leaving a cookie for reference. The same distance will be covered breathing from the stage in and out. The operation is repeated again, this time with DPV speed 4 - still breathing from the stage. Finally, once more with DPV speed 6. All the above, at an average depth of 4,1m, which remains constant. The reasoning behind it is to calculate the time taken for the same distance, for each exercise, the gas consumption at the beginning and at the end, the number of Bars converted in litres. In the end the purpose is to calculate the Surface Air Consumption (SAC), when the number of litres used is divided by



Adjusting the harness with separate bungees



The 'Rule of Thirds' for DPV



Kim introducing the 'Seacraft' DPV

the time, and then by the depth in ATM. The instructor brings his slab underwater in order to write all the data precisely. I perform the return swim in 30', the same stretch with DPV speed 4 in 12'30, with DPV speed 6 in 9'. Now I feel I am flying

and the stage hose over my shoulder is shaking like a leaf in the wind. Kim places it under my armpit. Problem solved. Negotiating curves to the right or to the left, is under control now, even sharp ones. In the next skill, pretending my scooter has a failure,



Tanks and DPV ready for the day, Protec Tulum

Kim will tow me, with the front of my DPV clipped to the back D-ring of his harness. I remain streamlined, slightly above and behind him to avoid the 'prop wash', shining the way with the torch on the back of my hand. Although he drives at speed 6, it feels like we are going at speed 4. In fact, we'll take the same time to cover the distance as when I went at speed 4. Now, it is my turn to tow Kim. My concentration and per-



Carwash cenote

formance are optimum. Kim shakes hands with me to prove me right. Eventually, I'll have to drop the DPV on the line, then the stage, and retrieve it before exit. I am elated by my renewed confidence. The last day of the course will take place at 'Mayan Blue', alias Escondido, which is across Cenote Cristal on the way to Coba. It is an elongated lagoon in the lush vegetation. The plan is to scooter 90 Bars into the main tunnel (see cover photo of Guidelines, Sept.2020 edition) and 90 Bars out. At the end of the lagoon, the cave entrance is a narrow vertical cleft, down to a depth of 20 metres. There, we soon hit the halocline and Kim zooms ahead at speed 6. Riding in his wake, I hardly see anything - except for a blur halo of light in the distance -, because of the mega-disturbance created by the halocline. Zigzagging left and right, up and down, - feeling like a plane lost in fog - I wonder how I did not bump into any wall or into any curves of the tunnel. A crazy uncomfortable sensation. Kim does not seem to worry about me, banking sideways once in a while to check if I am still behind. "Riding a DPV is the highest challenge and level in cave diving...", he confides later.

Checking depth on my computer, I realize with stupor that we are cruising at 24 metres. Reaching a double red arrow, Kim places a white arrow behind it, with a jump to the right. We enter a small tunnel with very nice chambers. Being left with 130 Bars as we reach a second jump. I wave the torch to signal the turn around. Leading the dive now, I do not suffer any side effect of the halocline, it is all for Kim! I do however notice a slight blur line just above eye level, as I slowly move upwards. Back below the cave entrance, DPV and stage are dropped on the line. Retrieving it again, I mess up a bit with the stage as I try to clip it to the rear D-ring of the harness, swirling around and stirring up the bottom in the process. "This is unacceptable!", thunders Kim, as we are back at the car. Correction is made on my sequence with the stage, in 4 clear steps. I make it to the lagoon like a miserable looking dog, with the tail between the legs.

I am already in the water with the tanks clipped in, when the O-ring of the regulator's swivel suddenly leaks. Bummer! In record time, Kim is out of the water, back to the pick-up and returns with a change of o-ring and the necessary tool. I am



Inside Choj Ha cave

impressed with such an efficient professionalism. The plan is now Mayan Blue's tunnel B, until the 2 red arrows, turning around to reach a single white arrow marking a jump. Kim places his spool line on the arrow, after we drop DPV and stage. We proceed in sidemount into a flat narrow winding tunnel with a low ceiling, purposely named 'Death Arrow Passage'. The depth is 22m and soon we penetrate a breathtaking chamber, with pillars and stalag-

mites, which we pass until we get to another jump. With 140 Bars left in the sides, I signal the turn around. Leading the way back to where we left the stage, I pick it up, paying attention to my buoyancy in a decent manner, collect the DPV and scooter back to the lower cave entrance without incident. Rising up in the terminal chimney, Kim points out to my computer indicating an unexpected 15 minutes deco stop! A maximum depth of 26m is recorded

for a dive time of 54 minutes. When Kim shows me speed 9 with his fingers, I'll finish the last 5' of deco in the lagoon, doing loops at hair rising speed, 'Crazy fast' for sure, but I manage satisfactorily. The instructor shakes hands heartily. I am good. A happy note after a tense day. As thrilling as the DPV Cave course may be, it teaches you one thing worth considering: you are playing with the far side of your life, mate. Don't you forget it.



The beam of light at Suytun cenote



Catfish at Suytun cenote



Cenote Nohoch Nah Chich

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Sidemount Sundays

By Meg Anderson • Photos by Danny Pethybridge

Last year I got invited to join an Adelaide based Facebook group called Sidemount Sundays. I noticed a few divers I knew were in this group and were meeting up regularly for sidemount dives (usually in Wallaroo). However I usually shore dive south of Adelaide (not north in Wallaroo) so I never got round to joining in on their sessions. My interest however was piqued when the group was mentioned a couple of times on CDAA member Steve Davis's podcast Speaking Sidemount

Recently I went to Wallaroo for the first time for a weekend and came to appreciate why Wallaroo Jetty is such a great site for practising skills. No matter what the weather, the site remains relatively sheltered and calm, it's also a nice easy and shallow entry. My buddies and I joined the Sidemount Sunday group on the Sunday for a session. I had just switched to a new sidemount harness (as my previous harness was old and had to retire) and had also made some other changes so I wanted to

iron out the kinks before I jumped into Tank Cave again. Danny has set up an area where divers can practise line work but I was quite content just to have a swim to get used to my new set up (and watch others prepare for torture in Gouldens). Wallaroo has a lot of distance so you can do a lot of swimming to feel out if the changes you have made are working for you or not. It was a thoroughly productive and enjoyable dive and Wallaroo also has a great café to enjoy a post dive lunch. I



decided to interview the group's founder, CDAA member Danny Pethybridge to find out more about how the group came about. Danny explained that Sidemount Sundays is a group dedicated to sidemount divers in Adelaide. Danny started sidemount with the intention of getting into deep and cave diving. He did a sidemount course in early 2017 and as soon as he completed the course he wanted to learn more as there is only so much you can learn in a few days. He researched online and came across an online training course which really helped him progress. Since then most of his diving has been in sidemount. Sidemount Sundays is about creating opportunities for those sidemount divers wanting to improve and progress into tech (whether cave or deco diving), to get together to practice skills, discuss set ups, exchange ideas and of course have fun dives. He came up with the idea after going for a dive with a couple of other sidemount divers who hadn't done many dives since their course and didn't get out in the water very often. During the dive he identified some areas where they were struggling with some minor issues. At their post dive debrief he offered solutions based on his experience and suggested everyone get together regularly to do some practice dives. Danny mentioned his idea for regular practice dives to a few other sidemount

divers who had just completed their sidemount courses and they also showed an interest. During the discussion Danny mentioned he would start a Facebook group but that he is only available to dive Sundays as he works 6 days a week. One of the guys said: "You should call the group Sidemount Sundays then" and the name stuck. But as Danny says, the meet ups don't have to just be on Sundays!

Danny's current focus for the group is helping the members wanting to do CDAA Basic Cave prepare for the course and practise core skills. As for the size of the group, he hasn't really thought about 'growing' it as such and he sees no limit to how small or big the group can be.

Meanwhile Danny's own goals are to progress with his cave diving journey and hopefully get some cave diving trips in over the next 12 months. He has thought about eventually becoming a diving instructor but is in no rush. He has created a great little community which includes many CDAA members who are encouraging and helping other divers to become future CDAA members. Personally I believe there is lots of potential for further membership growth for the CDAA in South Australia. However oftentimes people are too intimidated or don't know where to go for help or advice regarding cave diving and such a group

breaks down those barriers and introduces them to the cave diving community. Danny's group reminded me a lot of when I was in a group that met up at Thebarton pool on Tuesday nights to practise for CDAA courses, general skills or simply test new gear. These sessions were being organised by Steve "Ebay" Coulter and we jokingly called it "Ebay's Academy." Some may argue that non-instructors should not be giving advice to others but this is not about training divers but more about mentorship – it's about getting them comfortable in the water before they go and do their course and offering support and encouragement, so that they can get more out of it. And as we all know with sidemount, what works for someone else may not work for you so it's always good to test things out and keep practising!

***Sidemount Sundays can be found on Facebook.**



CDAА INSTRUCTORS

NAME	Basic Cave	Cave	Adv. Cave
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NEW SOUTH WALES

 FEATONBY, Tim (CDAА 3327) Worowing Heights, NSW Mob: 0402 129 253 E: tim.featonby@hotmail.com	Yes	Yes	Yes
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SOUTH AUSTRALIA

 PAYNE, Timothy (CDAА 2640) Mob: 0448 147 927 E: Tim@diveessentials.com	Yes	Yes	Yes
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VICTORIA

 BARCLAY, Gary (CDAА 1735) Mob: 0407 527 921 E: garinda@bigpond.com	Yes	Yes	Yes
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 BOWMAN, Jane (CDAА 1880) Mob: 0407 566 455 E: janelbowman@hotmail.com	Yes	Yes	Yes
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 CLARIDGE, Linda (CDAА 2214) Mob: 0408 052 070 E: garinda@tpgi.com.au	Yes	Yes	Yes
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NAME	Basic Cave	Cave	Adv. Cave
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VICTORIA Continued

 DALLA-ZUANNA, John (CDAА 236) Mob: 0407 887 060 E: jdz@paintandcustom.com.au	Yes	Yes	Yes
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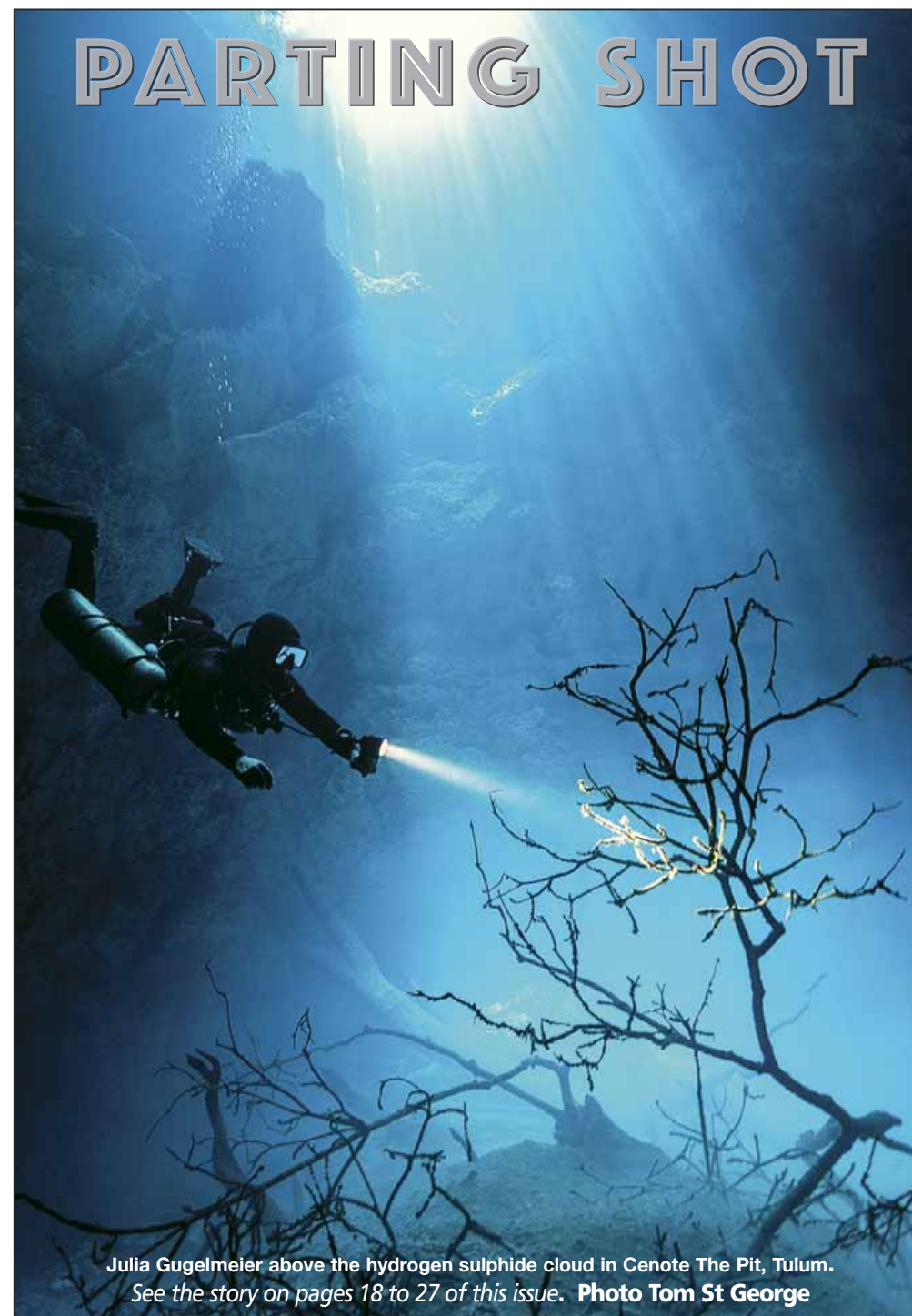
 EDWARDS, Chris (CDAА 2247) Mob: 0417 116 372 Email: chrisedwards01@me.com	Yes		
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 MONACO, Rubens (CDAА 1731) Mob: 0413 429 533 E: info@idcscuba.com.au	Yes	Yes	Yes
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WESTERN AUSTRALIA

 BICANIC, Josip (CDAА 4691) Mob: 0412 571 779 Email: joseph_b@me.com	Yes	Yes	
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PARTING SHOT



Julia Gugelmeier above the hydrogen sulphide cloud in Cenote The Pit, Tulum.
See the story on pages 18 to 27 of this issue. **Photo Tom St George**