

Marineland Dive

Written by Dave Allen (Photo's Peter Newton)

On Saturday, 31st July, 1965, a young skindiver, Bob Nicholls, aged 19 was getting ready to attempt a 24-hour underwater endurance dive in the pool at Marineland, Manly, N.S.W.

The idea behind this dive came from John Allen who at that time was trying to promote the idea of an underwater house to the public and interested industries. A lot of interest in the dive was shown by the press, radio and television, who sent reporters and cameramen to cover the dive on both Saturday and Sunday. Bob and myself appeared on the Don Lane Show on the following Thursday night, so in all, a lot of publicity was gained from this dive which benefits the two parties involved and the U.S.F.A.

Main problems of the dive were air, loss of body heat, feeding and nature. The first was overcome by Denis Robinson who supplied all the air used on the dive which amounted to 10,500 cubic feet, the second by adding as much woollen clothing as possible under Bob's diving suit so that in the end he looked like a little round blob! The problem of feeding was overcome by silver soldering a pipe onto the spitcock (the spitcock as the name implies is a valve by which water can be sucked into the diver's mouth and sprayed over the helmet glass to stop fogging) and a plastic squeeze bottle with a larger pipe attached was filled with either coffee with a heavy glucose content or orange juice also heavily concentrated with glucose. Bob had to be careful not to squeeze the bottle before he put his mouth to the valve or he got hot coffee or sticky orange juice all over his face, the last problem was by far the hardest to attend to as you couldn't have Bob saying over the radio "please Janice, may I leave the suit", a few of you may know what Janice might say at this point. Anyway back to the problem. I can't say how we fixed it as I don't think it would be published.

Bob, with the assistance of Peter Harper and myself, started dressing at 8.30 a.m. on the morning of the dive and walked up to the top level of the pool where, while he was being geared up, he had his photo and interviews taken by the press, etc.

With the help of some of the members, Bob was helped into the pool at 10.20 a.m. where he had to hang outside the second level while more photos were being taken, after this he was kept busy for the next hour by entertaining the public through the view-windows. Before any diver enters the pool the manager, Mr. Geoff Goodby, has them sign a release, this protects Marineland but not the diver? Still can't work out if "ravaged by a shark" means "attacked or some form of assault", either one of which would be most painful.

Jill Allen and Bob Nicholls

At about 12.30 p.m. I took the first dive to tighten up a cuff on the suit which had worked loose whilst Bob was using the vacuum cleaner on the bottom, these check dives usually take about 5-10 minutes and at no time during the dive did the suit leak or any other things go wrong.

During the dive to keep occupied, Bob did various chores in the pool such as collecting all the pennies off the bottom and divers would go down and play draughts or have a fight and at one time Bob was handed an "Australian Skindivers Mag." to read and it withstood the ravages of the salt water. Bob also had a few problems with the marine creatures such as wobbies trying to attach themselves to his leg and loggerhead turtles trying to get into the helmet.

At 4 p.m. Bob was given his first meal by Peter Harper. This was 6 hours after he first entered the water so he really enjoyed it. Peter finished his watch at 5 p.m. so I took the next one which lasted from 5 p.m.-2 a.m.

and in this time I did two feedings, 7 p.m. and 12 p.m. and two check dives, 11 p.m. and 1 a.m. The latter was to put an extra pair of mittens on Bob's hands as he was starting to feel the effects of the dive.

After I dragged myself from the pool at 1.15 a.m. and changed, I kicked John Allen in the ribs and told him it was his watch (for this I have never been forgiven). The only trouble with the dive was the tiring effect of having to go up and down the steps every five minutes, this plus lack of food and no sleep put everybody but Bob on the point of nervous exhaustion so at about 2 a.m. there were bodies lying everywhere. At this time Denis, who had been looking after the air, also took his leave and went to the land of Nod. So did I.

John fed Bob at 3.00 a.m., he also took some night shots of the fish (catching some of them in peculiar positions).

At 4.30 a.m. I and quite a few others were awakened by Janice Richards and told that Bob was coming out. Oh, well, no rest for the wicked. After a bit of talking Bob was induced to stay another 2 hours so he came out of the water at 6.20 a.m. after 20 hours underwater. He was helped from the water and taken down to the shower room. After a shower he was given a partial massage by Sylvia Sandler. After this, everybody relaxed for 5 minutes.

Due to the fact that Bob came out of the water 4 hours earlier than expected some of the team put on a Helmet and Scuba display so as to keep faith with the public.

