

# WET RAG



MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE  
SOUTH PACIFIC DIVERS' CLUB (established 1962)

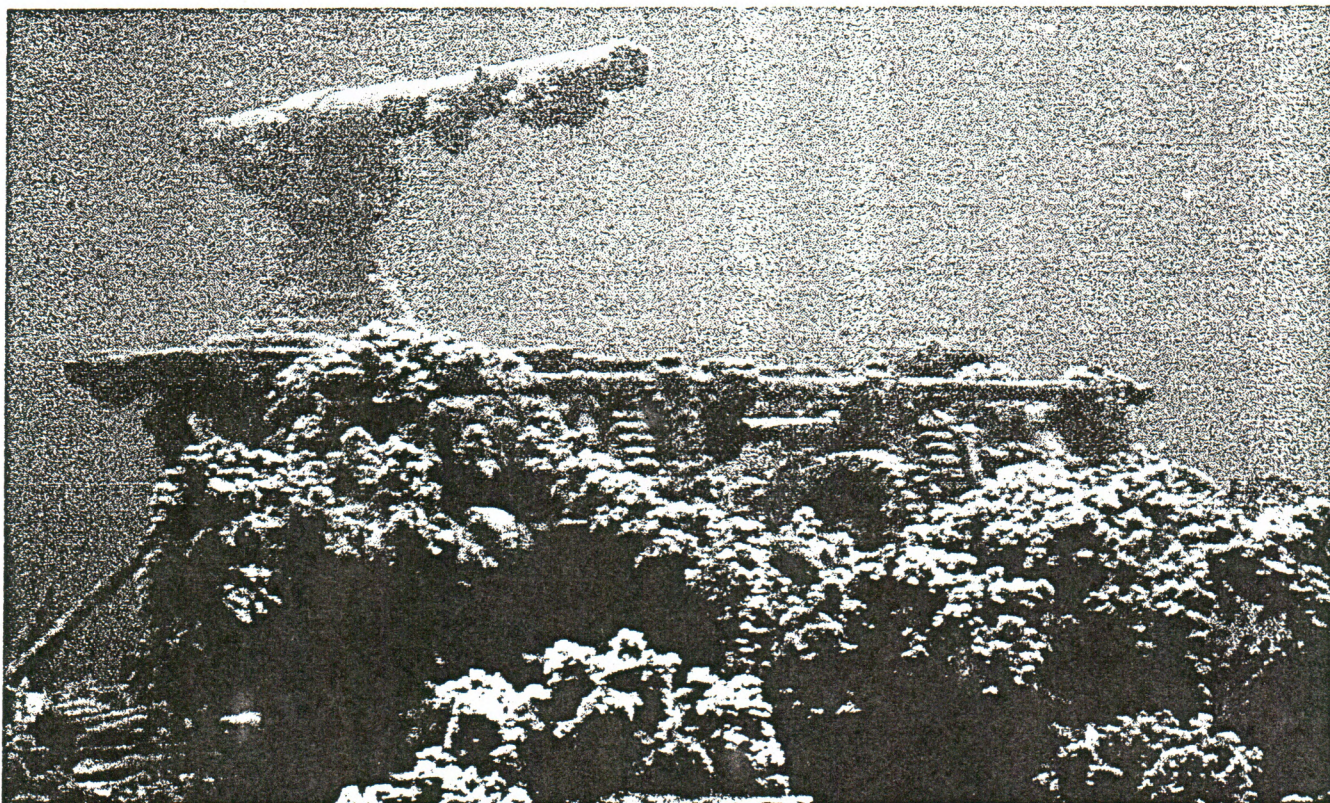
PO Box 823, BANKSTOWN NSW 2200

March 1996

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**THE NEXT CLUB MEETING WILL BE HELD  
ON MONDAY 18TH MARCH AND THE  
APRIL MEETING WILL BE 22ND TO ALLOW  
OUR GUEST SPEAKER TO ATTEND**

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Meetings of the Club are normally held at 8 pm on the 3rd Monday of each month in the Emile McDonald Room of the Bankstown Sports Club, Greenfield Street, Bankstown. This month's meeting will be held on Monday, 18 March 1996.



**President's Message**

March has arrived signaling the end of summer. I don't know about you people but I seemed to have missed the summer of '95 completely. The first weekend of March saw club members travel up to Nelsons Bay. From all reports good time was had on the Saturday. Not being able to spare the Saturday I landed there on Saturday night to find a couple of members all bitter and twisted (*depressed, with good reason*. ED.) over the election results. One young lady tried to drown her sorrows by demolishing a bottle of red, it did not work, the end result, she was quite crook the next day.

On the Sunday Margaret, Robyn, Barb and I went to Broughton Island on Jim Thatcher's inflatable, for a double dive. It was extremely enjoyable to finally spend a day out on the water. We did two good dives, Looking Glass, and Cod Rock. Thanks to Margaret for retrieving my snorkel.

Last Sunday the club entered for the second time in the Kings Cross Charity Bed Race. Our club was knocked out in the second round by, would you believe, the army commando team from Wagga. The walllopers from the Rocks nearly won the event proving this race is winnable. Ten people from the Bourbon & Beefsteak are on their way to Hawaii to compete in the world championships. To hear South Pacific Divers Club being called out over the loud speaker system time and time again in front of hundreds of spectators did us proud.

At our next meeting, Barry Hallett from Southern Cross Divers will give a presentation on nitrox diving and mixed gas diving. There is a big difference between the two and it is surprising the number of divers who still confuse the two. Even if you feel this is not your cup of tea come along, there is a vast amount of information to be learnt on this subject.

The April meeting has been moved to fourth Monday of the month to accommodate a special guest speaker who lives in Harvey Bay. More about that in the April edition of the WET RAG

Finally a big thanks to Peter Fields & John Riley for coming along last month, it surely opened up a healthy debate about the Historic Shipwrecks Act".

Regards Leo B

**Photographic Officer's Report**

I trust everyone has enjoyed taking those winning pics for the George Roberts Competition over the last month

At the meeting this month don't forget to hand in your exposed film or disposable cameras so that I can organise the processing. Videos don't have to be handed in until May. I will hand back the processed film at the April meeting for you to take away, mount & decide which slides / prints you will be submitting.

All slides, prints or videos that are being entered in the comp are to be handed to me at Remember :

There will be no extensions given to any one!!!!!!

As we still have some film & cameras left over from this competition we may later in the year organise a weekend away for a shoot-out

Stay tuned for further developments.

If any one is interested in the Australasian Underwater Photographer of the Year, I will have details by next month.

Regards, Peter Flockart

**Newsletter Editor's Message**

There has been quite a lot of interesting material coming in but there is always room for plenty more. If you think that your not quite up to a complete article I will have a column next month for you. Any stories, reports or comments of about 50 words will be included in a letters to the editor column. So if you have any input get it on paper and send it off to me.

If possible could any material small or large be typewritten or on disk if possible as I am a pretty bad typer myself and I can incorporate the printed material a lot easier.

Thanks for helping me make this newsletter more interesting for you to read with your stories and looking forward to more to come.

See you later

Russell



**COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

The following members are on the committee for the 1996 year.

Position	Name	Home No:	Work No:
President:	Leo Bergagnin	558 2592 Mobile: (041) 951 7285	517 2853
Treasurer:	Barbara Sweetman	550 1712	Pager 430 6285
Secretary:	Carina Gregory	(046) 25 8630	(046)20 1423
Photographic Officer:	Peter Flockart	371 0265 Fax: 374 2688	374 2382
Publicity Officer:	Paul Howlett	746 6720	377 3030
Dive Organizers:	Scott Leimroth Geoff Cook	759 6501 543 5817 Mobile (018) 29 4897	(019) 99 0864 [m] (018) 29 4891
(Nightdives Only)	Malcom Van Tiel Michael McFadyen	567 6266 558 8181 Mobile (015) 27 6556	316 5100 585 6434
Social Secretaries:	David Bilbow	564 1119	566 4333
Newsletter Editor:	Russell Stoker	799 2663 Mobile (018) 96 3527	217 1739

**BOAT OWNERS CONTACT LIST**

The following members of the Club are boat owners. They generally go out diving most weekends and often need extra divers to make up numbers. Why not give them a call one day. If you are a boat owner, why not give a non-owner a call (see the membership list distributed regularly) and invite them along with you.

Name	Home No:	Work No:
Sue Armstrong	042 94 2769	697 2248
Martin Atkins (lives in Jervis Bay area)	044 43 4631	042 74 0210
John Beddie	820 4272	046 20 1746
BJ	709 5535	
Peter Booth	529 3818	
Geoff Cook	543 5817	018 29 4891
Bruce Cremonesi	668 8126	645 0286
Martin Kandilas	725 7808	725 7808
Rick Latimer	645 4405	042 61 5631 018 64 7329
Bob May	045 79 1053	045 75 1177

**Remember, the following dive charter operators support the Club. You are encouraged to utilise their services when diving in the area they serve.**

Max Western, *Sea-tamer II* (Port Hacking area), 567 2658 or 018 28 0791.

Peter Hall (a Club member), Twofold Dive at Eden, 064 96 3384.

Steve Grow and Lee Harvey (Club members), Aquatic Explorers, Cronulla, 527 1518 or 018 55 3858.

If you are going to Jervis Bay (or want to dive there) how about phoning member Martin Atkins who lives in the area. He is always looking for dive buddies. See his numbers above.

**SCUBA CLUBS ASSOCIATION OF N.S.W.**

Continuing on from the success of the previous combined club events. The next one not to be missed will be held at the Prince Of Wales Hospital, the new home of Hyperbaric Unit. Friday the 3rd of May is the date. John Lippmann will be traveling to Sydney from Melbourne to talk on how to manage a dive accident. Paul

Newland from the Westpac Helicopter Rescue service will also talk, and finally a tour of the refurbished chamber..

**I SPY**

Which Independant Dive club boat was seen off Cronulla with a boat load of fishermen (presumably not a charter or the Bait and tackle shops will be up in arms!)



## DIVE REPORTS

### Jervis Bay By John Szwcow

In January I stayed with Martin and Heather Atkins at Falls Creek, Looking forward to a weeks diving. It seemed the weather had other ideas, on the night I arrived a southerly had blown in with constant rain. The next day was spent visiting the ruins of the Stony Creek lighthouse and Point Perpendicular, then down to Currawong and a walk out to the wreck of the Merrimbula. The sea was flat here, we decided to tow the boat to Crookhaven Heads, which has excellent launch facilities, then headed for Currawong. A first dive was on the Merrimbula in clear water. Martin enjoyed finding treasure on the wreck, with a dive time of 99 minutes, Heather was not so impressed and vowed never to dive with him again. A second dive was at Lobster Bay, here a boulder strewn bottom revealed a lot of macro life.

It was another two days before the weather allowed us to dive again. We intended to dive Bowen Island after reports of blue water and 20m+ viz, the sea conditions outside looked inviting so we headed for Stony Creek. Martin, using his local knowledge was able to put us on the best part of the wall, a seal came in for a visit and looked spectacular swimming through the blue water, I dropped down the wall to 45m to show Heather a black coral tree and as we started our ascent a large school of trevally cruised along the wall. A second dive was at north west Bowen, Martin showed us a site he discovered, spectacular swim throughs, I also spotted a lot of squat lobsters in the brain corals as well as an Isopod that I photographed.

Well what dive could top a dive like we had at Stony Creek? Another dive the next day at Stony Creek, the water was as blue and the viz as good. Heading down the anchor line at 20m a large school of yellow tail, Kingfish at 40m were schooling and were there for most of the dive, also schools of Trevally and a large school of bullseye were around us. This part of Stony Creek is the deepest with atolls and the wreck of the fishing trawler "Dalkieth Star" locally built, it sank in 1928, laying at 55m the trawler is approximately 20m east of the wall and only visible on days such as we had. We were also fortunate that no current was flowing for our dives here. A second dive for the day was at north

west Bowen, same conditions as the day before, another great dive.

With such superb conditions it was interesting to note the commercial dive operators dropping divers at the northern wall of Bowen and the nursery!

### The Wreck of the Paddle Steamer Koputai

The PS Koputai is the deepest discovered shipwreck off the Sydney coastline. Originally found by David Allchin and Barry Hallett of Southern Cross Divers in 1993, the Koputai is a Paddle Steamer of 120 feet. This discovery would have to rank as THE unsung achievement in wreck diving in N.S.W.

Built in Whiteinch, Scotland in 1876, the Koputai was a vessel of 158 tons, and was employed as a tug by the Otago Harbour board, NZ until purchased by Messrs J&J Daley, of Sydney.

The journey across the Tasman Sea was far from ordinary, the Koputai striking bad weather all the way, and running out of coal while still out of sight of land. All decking and even some of the bulkheads had to be sacrificed to the boiler to make it to Sydney. Imagine the look on the owners face when he first laid eyes on his latest acquisition!!

In March 1920, while steaming out to meet an American sailing vessel heading up the coast in a brisk southerly, the Koputai was seen to slow by the signal station on South Head. At twenty to five, the Koputai finally stopped, and 9 minutes later was gone, sinking by the stern.

The crew of 4 managed to take to a boat, and were picked up by the Dinoga, before being transferred to the pilot steamer Captain Cook, and brought in to Watsons Bay [for a drink a two no doubt).

No explanation for the sinking was given.

### The Koputai Today...

The first thing you notice when making your way to the dive site is the distance from shore. It seems you are in middle of no-where, and at least 3 times the distance out than other wrecks in Sydney.

Obviously being this far out exposes the site to the full onslaught of the elements, be it wind, wave or current. Usually all three. You are constantly reminded you are in the ocean, not in protected inshore waters.

Finding the wreck is the first challenge. In calm water it is easy, but usually the current takes you on a tangent to the transit points. Everyone takes turns directing the skipper to the marks, even though they have no idea where it is. If you stop for even a minute you will find yourself miles from the Marks, and a 5 minute run back.



Picking up the 120 foot vessel 4 miles offshore in a current and wind, brings you no closer to picking in. The record number of anchor drops is 8 times, each time laying up to 400 feet of rope. Rope which needs to be retrieved each time. Having picked in, it is time to gear up. The depth of this dive makes air a hazardous choice, and since the advent of mixed gas diving in Sydney, the majority of dives have been on mix. Deep air kills. Certainly no charter boat will take you out on air.

Mixed gas diving means lots of gear. In addition to the back mounted cylinders containing a helium, nitrogen and oxygen mixture, decompression cylinders are necessary, containing nitrox mixes, and possibly oxygen as well. All divers carry 3 or 4 cylinders, so for 5 gas divers, there will be around 18-20 cylinders, when the deck mounted oxygen is included. Add to this powerful lights, reels and safety markers, and drysuits, and you have a package more at home on a ship than a dive boat.

Somehow, given all the drama involved in doing this dive, people still manage to have fun. After struggling to the bottom against the current with all that gear, the wreck itself would have to rate as the best wreck dive in Sydney. It is invariably dark on the bottom, but usually has good visibility. The absence of light precludes the growth of algae, the number one cause of bad vis. The Koputai is upright on a sand bottom, but the bow rests on a flat sandstone slope, which is populated with sea whips and gently slopes into the gloom.

The boiler is huge for the size of the vessel, a product of the horse power required for tug duties. The paddle wheels (apart from the wooden blades) are still intact, as is the engine and boiler combination. The thin deck and cabin steel has corroded away, and the hull has collapsed in most places. However the pointed bow and blunt stern is still discernible. Items of interest on the wreck, which is still untouched, are the binnacle, secured under a large pipe, and the engine room telegraph with bell. The arrow can still be read on the brass backplate, and reads something strange from memory, not stop or forward but astern. Off the starboard stern lies an anchor. Your bottom time all to soon is up, and the pick must be thrown, and the long haul to the surface begins. The 1st stop is around the 40mtr mark, and the total deco times ranges from 60 to 120 minutes, depending on the bottom time, which is usually all to brief at 15-18 minutes, but up to 25 minutes.

All this fun is expensive, and runs at about \$120-150, or almost \$10 per minute of bottom time. So if you thought before that gas divers were either brave or stupid, now you know for sure they are committed.

## Diving on "The Banks"

by Martin Atkins

On Sunday the 18th and Monday the 19th of February we had some fantastic conditions out on the atolls at the bottom of Stony Creek wall, and I was looking at another 2 days before I went back to work and nobody to dive with. So I gave John Swzecow a ring to see if he could swing some time and come down. He told me he could make Tuesday afternoon and all day Wednesday.

Tuesday Afternoon came and John and I had our usual photo sessions on Stony Creek wall and topped it off with a dusk dive at Bowen Island. Tuesday night over the B.B.Q. I made the suggestion for the following days diving "How about a dive on Sir John Young Banks? It not being a weekend we shouldn't have trouble with the fishermen and water conditions are fantastic." I said. John was intrigued as I told him more about "The Banks"

Sir John Young Banks lies approximately 16km east of Crookhaven (where the Shoalhaven meets the ocean). It is right out in the domain of the East Australian current and is noted for blue water, Steep walls and canyons, strong currents and large pelagics (sharks). "The Banks" have produced many game fish records over the years but as ocean fish stocks have been depleted by overfishing, sadly "the Banks" have been on the decline as a game fishing hot spot and I haven't been out there fishing since the late 80's/early 90's.

Wednesday came and we left Crookhaven with a full fuel load and headed out, ~RIGHT OUT

After about 20mins running time and 7 nautical miles the temperature display on the sounder showed a jump in water temp and the ocean became a deep cobalt blue. We had entered the East Australian current and left the coastal water behind. About 20 minutes later I brought the boat off the plane and changed sounder modes from speed/temp/log display to bottom display and looking back towards land started to line up on the marks for some of the drop offs and canyons of "the Banks", where large pelagics live. You have to line up Coolangatta Mountain with a dip in the escarpment behind. The actual coast itself is only a thin line on the horizon which comes and goes with the passing seas. The only other reference you have is your sounder which reveals



dramatic rises, plateaus and drop offs from what a few moments before was a flat featureless bottom. And your a long way from home!

In due course we dropped anchor at the bottom of a sheer wall which dropped from 130ft(40m) to 190ft(57m), and after setting decompression lines etc. John and I geared up and entered the water in search of large pelagics.

"The banks has a bad reputation for strong currents. Currents that have to be seen to be believed. I've seen the current change from dead slack to one which causes great whirlpools in the sea and the waves to stand up and break within minutes, Under these conditions a boat at anchor will produce a white foaming bow wave and awash as if it is in motion. But as we swam to the anchor line the current was only mild in that we could swim against it.

Going down the anchor line the water was clear and blue and it wasn't long before the bottom came into view far below. As we traveled down the anchor line into the deepest layers of water the current dropped off and everything was still. It was only illusionary however because the anchor line was still bar tight. We were either being blanketed from the current by the large plateau ahead of us or were in a deeper and still layer of water with a surface current on top. We were both very aware of where we were and what was happening.

The anchor had hooked nicely over a rocky outcrop in the sand at a depth of 53m adjacent to an extensive reef system dominated by the sheer walls of the plateau ahead of us. Everything was so bright for this depth it was as if we were only in 20ft of water. The reef life was prolific and somewhat different to the inshore areas. It may be that due to the influence of the current and warmer water there are more semi tropical species present.

John had elected to leave his camera on the boat as it is rather bulky and could become a nuisance in conditions of current, but I had a Nikonis IVA with a 20mm lens and was able to get some hopefully good shots in the available light.

Midway through the dive I saw a school of tuna come through and skirt the top of the plateau in the distance. We spent most of the dive around the rocky outcrops the anchor was hooked into just in case it started to move on us. On the down current side of the anchor the sandy bottom sloped quickly away dotted with rocky outcrops

to well over 200ft. All too quickly our time was up and at 20 minutes bottom time we began our ascent still looking out for the pelagics. As we arrived at the decompression lines at the back of the boat we had a 30 minute decompression profile with a first stop at 30ft. Midway through the 20 ft stop my computer started beeping away madly, warning me I was starting to get to shallow I was now at 5.5m and rising when I should be at 6m the current had just kicked into overdrive and I started paying out deco line to get down again. My decompression lines are 50-60ft long with weights on the end to hold divers in conditions of current and John and I were soon down below our stop depth.

Occasionally during our time on the deco line I would turn around and look down current to make sure I wasn't being investigated by some large pelagic, Bandits at six o clock sort of thing. But no, we were left alone to fizz around in peace.

When we got back on the boat we broke out the Husky pies and cakes and washed it all down with coffee and fruit juice. The sea was flattening off all the time and we decided to try a second dive somewhere shallower after a decent surface interval.

We tried to hook up on a shallow plateau where the sounder had shown a depth of less than 60ft we could see the bottom quite clearly but our first two tries were not successful due to the strong current. The third attempt we were successful in holding anchor and we geared up and entered the water with a surface interval of 2 hours 4 minutes. On our way down the anchor line we felt the anchor start to drag and bounce through the line. As we got into view of the anchor I saw it hook in near the edge of the plateau we had only moments before been directly above. We got a bit closer to it then it came loose and down it went. I remember thinking to myself "you rotten illegitimate thing anchor" or something along those lines. Then it hooked in again into a ledge at the bottom of the plateau and held.

Our depth at the anchor was 100ft(30m) at the bottom of the plateau. The anchor was in a forest of kelp which stood around 5ft high. This type of kelp was different to our normal inshore kelp, it was smooth and rubbery with no nodules on it at all. It stood up tall rather than lay flat and was very strong.

John and I just hung onto the anchor and looked to see what might swim by, we didn't have long to wait. Soon we saw a large pelagic gliding high above us silhouetted against the sun with the ramparts of the plateau as a backdrop - Magnificent! No film left.

The large pelagic was about 9ft long with a head shaped like the bone out of a "T" bone steak, I decided to call it a "T" bone headed cartilaginous



pelagic that was very very big. But John called it some funny name, Hammerhead shark or something I think he said.

We were soon down to 4 minutes no stop time remaining so I pulled out the anchor and hooked it into the chain and we went for a ride on the current and watched the bottom disappear below us. We then ascended for a long safety stop and

climbed into the boat - What a days diving!

I'm going to return to "The Banks" soon and I need a crew. If the current is not too strong I might try some drift diving. 2 divers on a weighted line attached to a buoy which the boat can follow.

WHO IS GAME?

## **SOUTH PACIFIC DIVERS WERE OFF TO THE SOLOMONS**

We have planned for this year a trip to the Solomon Islands. The trip will be a live-aboard for seven days on the "Spirit of the Solomons" We have been able to secure the only seven days available this year from the Seventh of September to the Fifteenth of September. The diving will be suitable for all levels and types including wrecks and reefs/walls. The cost will be approx. \$2500 and will include airfares, transfers, accommodation, meals and diving. The numbers are limited and bookings will be taken on a first in first served basis. Deposits are being taken now. To secure a place see or call Leo as we already have a number of bookings in hand. As anybody who has been there, the Soloman Islands has diving not to be missed!

### **BSAC**

A number of club members have already taken advantage of the benefits of joining BSAC. At £56 for inwater worldwide insurance as well as free courses up to instructor level it's well worth it. If your interested call or talk to Leo or Scott at the next meeting.

### **NEXT ISSUE**

Details of the Australasian Underwater Photographer of the Year Competition, more dive reports including one from Joe Ingeniri about his favourite dive in Vanautu, letters to the editor and the usual details of all our upcoming activities.



**Please ring the dive and social organizers on the Tuesday or Wednesday before the event to confirm details etc.**

### UPCOMING DIVING ACTIVITIES

**Contact Numbers:** Scott Leimroth 759 6501 [h] (019) 99 0864 [m] and Geoff Cook 543 5817 [h] or (018) 29 4897 [w]

**Night dives:** Michael McFadyen 585 6434 [w] 558 8181 [h] (015) 27 6556 [m]

#### March

24th breakfast dive Jibbon Beach

25th Night dive with McFadge

#### April

8th Night dive with McFadge

20th-21st Seal Rocks. Catterthun, Satara and sharks. Pacific Palms

25th-28th Anzac long weekend to South West Rocks

#### September

In September the Club is organising a dive trip to the **Solomon Islands**. See previous page for details.

#### October

In October, Michael McFadyen is organising a dive trip to Madang in **Papua New Guinea**. Nine members of the Club have already booked on the trip and a very limited number of spots remain. The cost will be about \$1700 for 11 nights accommodation, airfares and 16 dives. See Michael as soon as possible if you are interested.

### NIGHT DIVING

The next in a regular series of fortnightly (or thereabouts) **night dives** will occur on **Monday 25 March** at **North Bondi** at 7.00pm. Led by Michael McFadyen, the dives will try to be to a different site each time and will start at about 7.00 pm. Meet at 7.00 pm. After the dive, we will have a sausage sizzle using the Club's new portable BBQ. Beer and wine will be available for a nominal charge and a dollar will get you a sausage or two. You could also bring a thermos of tea or coffee for warming up after the dive. There will be another night dive on **Monday 8th April** at **Fairlight**. Contact Michael on 558 8181 [h] or 015 27 6556 if you are interested in coming or wish to check the location in poor weather.

**SOCIAL ACTIVITIES Contact Numbers:** David Bilbow 564 1119(h) 566 433(w)

#### May:

The revenge **skirmish match** has been rescheduled for **12 May 1996**. A three way battle between URG, Ryde Underwater and South Pacific will take place. Stay tuned for more details.

Scans night at the chamber on the **3rd** Details inside

### NEXT CLUB MEETING

Remember, this month's meeting will be held on **Monday 18 March, 1996**, starting at 8 pm in the Emile McDonald Room of the Bankstown Sports Club.

### FUTURE CLUB MEETINGS

Monday 22 April, 20 May and 17 June 1996.

**CLUB SPONSORS** The South Pacific Divers' Club is honoured to be sponsored by the following:

**Aquatic Explorers**, see Steve or Lee at 7 Beach Arcade Cronulla, 527 1518

**Bev's Restaurant** at Chippendale

**Dive Quest, Mullaway**, contact Chris or Gary on (066) 54 1930

**Max Western's Sea-tamer II** charter boat, contact Max on 567 2658 or (018) 28 0791

**Selera Restaurant**, Level 1, 264 King Street Newtown, 557 5186

**Shiprock Dive** at Lilli Pilli

**Southern Cross Divers** at The Spit Marina

**Sub Aquatics Divers** at Beverly Hills

**South West Rocks Dive Centre**, South West Rocks, contact Noel or Belinda on (065) 66 6474

**Twofold Dive Charters**, Eden, contact Peter or Lorna on (064) 96 1778

