



Pro-Dive Underwater Nature Trail

Gordon's Bay, Sydney, Australia

by John Rowe

The idea for an underwater nature trail goes back as far as 1985. Rick Poole, one of the original founders of Pro-Dive Australia, and Dennis Hunt, formerly the manager of Pacific and Commercial Diving Supplies, got together to build an underwater nature trail. Bob Carr, the local member for Pagewood was an early enthusiastic supporter and it was eventually found that the Department of Lands in New South Wales was responsible for Gordon's Bay and granted Pro-Diving Services a lease on the area in order to build the underwater trail.

It was first proposed that the trail run from Gordon's Bay through to Coogee Beach. That would appear to be a little too far. In 1990, John Rowe a local Clovellyite, who considers Gordon's Bay just an extension of his own back yard, approached Rick with a view to getting the job completed.

John has been greatly assisted by many people but, in particular, his stepson Angus Sullivan, pupils from Angus' school at Cranbrook and also pupils from Marist Brothers, Pagewood and Peter Clark being the major contributors to the project. Joëlle Devis put many long hours into constructing the map of the underwater trail and George Daniel, proprietor of 'Oh Calcutta' restaurant, the best Indian one in Sydney, and his friend John Daley, have also been regular workers on this underwater trail.

Moral support for the project has come from Maria Long, the Regional Director, Department of Sport & Recreation and Tourism. Maria's department was responsible for building the concrete access path right to the water's edge, making access to the water a lot easier for scuba divers.

Also in the early stages there were a great number of divers who assisted in logging dives in order to estimate where the most appropriate place was to lay the underwater trail.

Features of the Underwater Trail

1. A known area.
2. Access to the dive site is very easy.
3. Diver orientation is greatly improved.
4. Novice divers can easily orientate themselves by using the underwater trail.
5. Reduces possibility of divers separating.
6. Reduction of diver anxiety from knowing where their buddies are at any time.
7. There is no need for divers to surface to locate their position as they know where they are.
8. Given difficult diving conditions divers can use the chain to reduce fatigue by hauling hand over hand.

Construction

As far as we are aware there is no other permanent underwater trail in Australia and we would almost like to claim this as a first for Sydney. (Editor: Lady Elliot Island has had an underwater trail for many years and there are several more around Australia.) * Most are temporary.

As an underwater trail had not been previously constructed there were several thoughts on how this should be done. In essence, forty four gallon drums were cut down to a third in size and filled with concrete from surplus at St. George Mini Mix, Hurstville. St. George Mini Mix at the pouring stage also inserted a stainless steel bolt with a ring welded on the top.

Using the Pro-Dive truck these drums, twenty seven in all, were transported to the Gordon's Bay area. Generally, it required four men to lift the drums from the truck and position them at the site. Security turned out to be a problem in that on the very first day that the drums were stored there three were pushed straight into the water by unknown assailants. They were eventually recovered. It was an extremely onerous task to transport the drums from the parking lot to the water and generally this was done in stages and any divers at the time working in the area where frequently chain-ganged into getting these into the water. Once the drums were at the water's edge, the

drums had to be pushed through a surf into sufficiently deep water, about a metre and a half to two metres, before an airbag could be attached to the drum and then the drums were pushed to a dump site by scuba divers.

The actual siting of the drums on the trail was done by one of the Cranbrook boys rowing a rubber boat around with John Rowe in the water twenty metres behind and a scuba diver's lead weight was attached to about ten metres of cord. At each twenty metre interval the lead weight was dropped and these became the markers for the drums. Over several months the drums were then moved into position. Chain, polypropylene rope and stainless steel wire were first used to connect the drums and lay out the trail. However, in very first large sea, the polypropylene rope proved entirely inadequate in that it broke and the stainless steel wire had no holding power and it also broke. Only the chained concrete drums remained in position. All of the other drums were transported several metres around the bay the the large seas. All of these drums then had to be relocated and remarked. This was done with empty milk cartons, as they were cheaper and available without any problems from Bill and Toni's coffee shop in Stanley Street, East Sydney. The drums were again remarked at the surface, making for what one would consider to be a very unattractive diving site with some twenty four empty milk cartons bobbing up and down on the surface.

Regretfully, the milk cartons had a tendency to leak in high seas and the marked trail was again lost. However, through many dives and many searchings the trail was remarked again and some eight hundred metres of six millimetre galvanised chain was acquired and paid for by Pro-Dive costing somewhere in the vicinity of \$4,000.

Angus Sullivan rowed the boat and fed the chain to John Rowe, George Daniel and John Daley and the chain was shackled to each of the drums underwater. Each drum now has a numbered tag from one through to twenty four and in order to get this far work originally started in April 1990 and was completed in November 1990. It involved some some 30 divers, over 70 dives and approx 109 hours underwater to get to this stage.

Trail Diving

The UBD map reference is Map 72 D4/5 and in order to get there, one gets to Clovelly Road, follows Clovelly Road to the very end into the car park and, taking the extreme point of the car park, the entrance to Gordon's Bay is identified by the Randwick Municipal Council and the Department of Sport & Recreation's scuba diver access path sign.

What to do when going for a Dive

Car Locking. Ensure that your car is locked and preferably that the alarm is turned on. There are frequent reports of burglaries and attempted break-ins to cars parked there particularly during the week when there are few cars and fewer people about.

Weather. The best diving in the area is on the high tide and preferably when a northerly or westerly wind is prevailing. Calm conditions are generally experienced in the morning. Southerly conditions generally bring the sea up and particularly if the southerly has been blowing for several days making diving difficult.

Advice. Advise the local dive shop of your intention to dive the trail. This will particularly help with statistics in terms of the usage and particularly in regard to having the area declared a marine park.

Access. Access to the trail is gained simply by following the access path to the water's edge and there is a large Pro-Dive marker buoy marking the No. 1 position.

Swimming the trail can be done by simply starting at No. 1 and swimming all the way through to drum No. 24 and picking up at drum No. 3 which then returns the diver to the shore.

Any variation of these numbers can easily be done either by taking a left or a right turn. By consulting the map, you can plan your own dive. Remember, plan your dive and dive your plan!

■ Sea horses do frequent the sponge gardens as do many other elusive life forms.



PHOTO BY MIGUEL MARSH/UNDERWATER GEOGRAPHIC

The trail is approximately 700 metres long and takes an average diver without stopping to check the fantastic marine life about 35 to 40 minutes to swim. Air consumptions vary enormously by roughly as a guideline, a 64 cc tank is probably just sufficient and an 88 may use up to for low air consumption about half a tank to a full tank for large tank divers.

Do not use the local marine animals to feed the local fish. With the number of divers using the area this will quickly upset the balance if sea urchins are used.

Community Service

As the Pro-Dive underwater trail has been largely built as a community service, we would be most grateful to all divers if they would report any damages, breakages or major changes that would affect other people's diving pleasure.

Common Marine Life

Many marine animals are very territorial and you may observe the same fish, eel or shrimp at the

same site each time you dive the site. Divers have compiled a list of local marine life, this includes: over 50 species of fish, sponges, cnidarians, worms, crustaceans, Molluscs, Echinoderms and sea squirts. A complete list is available at Pro-Dive.

Nature Reserve

Under the Department of Environment and Planning's guidelines for the Eastern beaches, this Department has recommended that Gordon's Bay be declared a marine park. We at Pro-Dive would be very keen to see this happen and we would urge you to contact Mr Ian Causley, Minister for Natural Resources, Level 12, Westfield Tower, 100 William St, East Sydney, NSW 2011. Tel: (02) 368-2777, Fax: (02) 368-2700.

WARNING

Divers following the underwater nature trail do so entirely at their own risk. Pro-Diving services cannot guarantee their safety and will not be held liable for any injury or loss or damage.



PHOTO BY MIGUEL MARSH/UNDERWATER GEOGRAPHIC

■ "Blue groper" wrasse are seen on most dives at Gordon's Bay.