Feb 2nd 2004 WOLF ROCK DIVE REPORT

Diving at Wolf Rock this week was hi-tech with visiting researchers from Brisbane trained in the use of the nitrox rebreather system instead of the more common SCUBA.

The difference between common scuba and re-breather, is that scuba is generally referred to as open circuit where the air you breath is vented into the atmosphere by way of bubbles every time you exhale. This creates a lot of noise under the water, not to mention the unfortunate waste of a lot of perfectly good oxygen. You see air is made up of 21% oxygen and 79% nitrogen and every time you breathe in, your body only retains 3-4% oxygen. The gas exchange then takes place in your lungs and blood stream producing a bi-product called carbon dioxide (CO2). Every time you breathe out you emit about 16-17% oxygen and the rest is made up of CO2 and nitrogen which are both waste gases.

Alternatively, a re-breather system incorporates an oxygen enriched air source that recirculates your own gasses filtered through a canister of crystals called a scrubber. The scrubber traps the carbon dioxide when you exhale yet allows the oxygen to be recycled over and over, hence the term closed circuit apparatus. One of the advantages is that it produces no bubbles and less noise, enabling the diver to approach marine creatures somewhat undetected and therefore allowing a closer inspection and longer dive times.

The purpose of the whole exercise was to test the personal space of the grey nurse shark and attempt to make positive identification of individual animals. The difference in proximity using re-breather was quite plain and sometimes a little unnerving even though the grey nurse shark is well known to be of the harmless variety. They like to swim with their mouths open so when they come close enough to rub noses with you and give you a look at their tonsils, the words 'too close for comfort' come to mind.

In the past, re-breather technology was only available to the military for its obvious tactical advantages. Now it is becoming more accessible to the average diver but only after an intense training program and quite a significant amount of money.

Currently we have 16 grey nurse sharks, all females, as well as several giant Queensland gropers, eagle rays, bullrays and wobbegongs. Water temperature is 26 degrees on the surface and 22 degrees in the thermo cline. Visibility 15 metres.

Feb 10th 2004 WOLF ROCK DIVE REPORT

It seems this week has been 'backpacker week' with kids of all nationalities travelling with their divers ID card already in their possession. Normally it's very difficult to convince a backpacker that there is anywhere else to dive in Australia other than The Great Barrier Reef.

In the last few days we have been host to some youngsters who are travelling with all their own equipment and some just toting mask and snorkel. On Tuesday we took out a Danish couple that gained their Divemasters certificate while working on the big boats up off Cairns. Although they had clocked up over 80 dives on The Great Barrier Reef, they said that Wolf Rock was the best dive they had ever done. We were happy to hear this although, in our opinion, it was a reasonably quiet day at Wolf Rock. It's not the first time we've been told this and we hope that the word will spread and give other travellers another reason to make the trek into Rainbow Beach.

However the diversity of life at Wolf Rock speaks for itself - from little 'Nemo', moray eels and octopus through to large pelagics such as giant trevally, king fish and barracuda. Then we have the top of the food chain with giant groupers and the grey nurse sharks, the manta and eagle rays that never fail to impress. In all, it takes a very healthy marine ecosystem to sustain such a large array of life in one place and with Wolf Rock only a ten-minute boat ride from shore.

Visibility is currently 15 - 20 metres and water temperature is now stable at 25 degrees.

Kev Phillips Wolf Rock Dive Centre

Feb 17th 2004 WOLF ROCK DIVE REPORT

Courses have kept us busy over the last week with new divers and divers wanting to continue their education. Wolf Rock is a perfect dive site for conducting the Advanced Open Water Diver Course, which takes on average 2 days and 1 night.

This Advanced Course contains more comprehensive training in deep diving, multilevel diving and navigation along with elective skills such as underwater photography, search and recovery, underwater naturalist and night diving. All designed to broaden the students experience level and create a well-rounded diver.

The first dive of the course is usually the deep diver portion where the Instructor tests for the effects of nitrogen narcosis by giving the student certain tasks to complete such as spelling and arithmetic. These exercises are timed and then compared to the

time you would take to complete them on the surface. You would be surprised at how many people make simple mistakes and how long they take to complete the tasks when under the effect of nitrogen narcosis (a bit like being under the influence of alcohol).

The multilevel dive is designed to give divers the maximum time possible under the water but still experience significant depths. In the past the only way to calculate these types of dives was by using something called the PADI wheel, a fairly complex set of tables which even some professionals had trouble with. With the introduction of computers to the diving industry it has made multilevel diving much easier. A multilevel dive always starts at the deepest point first and then the dive is staged out at different depths in order to prolong the bottom time.

Well that's what we've been up to this week. Currently at Wolf Rock we have 15 grey nurse sharks and 2 giant gropers. Water temperature is a toasty 27 degrees, visibility is 10 metres.

Diving at Wolf Rock this past month was hi-tech with visiting researchers from Brisbane trained in the use of the nitrox rebreather system instead of the more common SCUBA – self contained underwater breathing apparatus.

The difference between common scuba and re-breather, is that scuba is generally referred to as open circuit where the air you breath is vented into the atmosphere by way of bubbles every time you exhale. This creates a lot of noise under the water, not to mention the unfortunate waste of a lot of perfectly good oxygen. You see air is made up of 21% oxygen and 79% nitrogen and every time you breathe in, your body only retains 3-4% oxygen. The gas exchange then takes place in your lungs and blood stream producing a bi-product called carbon dioxide (CO2). Every time you breathe out you emit about 16-17% oxygen and the rest is made up of CO2 and nitrogen that are both waste gases.

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In the past, re-breather technology was only available to the military for its obvious tactical advantages. Now it is becoming more accessible to the average diver but only after an intense training program and quite a significant amount of money.

The diving over the past few weeks at Wolf Rock has been exceptionally good with between 25 to 30 grey nurse sharks, all females, as well as several giant Queensland gropers, eagle rays, bullrays, manta rays and wobbegongs. Even Nursery Reef has provided us with a first – the biggest nudibranch we've ever seen, measuring about 30 cm long and about 15cm wide.

Water temperature is 26 degrees on the surface and 22 degrees in the thermo cline. Visibility has been an average of 15 metres.

Feb 22nd 2005 WOLF ROCK DIVE REPORT

Here we are approaching late February and the peak of the season for grey nurse sharks. Currently at Wolf Rock we can confirm 27 grey nurse sharks possibly up to 30 individuals, all in mid water and very inquisitive.

As they swim past, you can see their eye move as they check you out. Really quite exhilarating when suspended in the water column with sharks above you, below you and beside you. Visiting divers are going home with more than their money's worth, with giant gropers and eagle rays putting on a display as well. Two grey nurse sharks are showing some strange scarring, almost octagonal in shape with a concentric pattern not seen before. Very interesting indeed.

Water temperature is 27 - 28 degrees, visibility is 15 metres.

Well it was interesting to look back at what we were reporting this time last year for the month of February and I was surprised to see that we recorded a water temperature of 26 degrees. For the past month or two we have experiencing water temperatures of between 27 - 31 degrees, so the water is definitely warmer.

What we are seeing the same as this time last year is the same number and behaviour of the grey nurse sharks. At the moment we are counting between 25 and 30 of them at a depth of between 10 & 15 metres in the water column. This is the same pattern that we observed last year at the same time which could prove to be a significant part of their behavioural patterns. However we'll let the experts analyse this and get on with enjoying our diving.

The other thing of interest in our report this time last year was that we were still diving on Nursery Reef. Unfortunately over the past 12 months the algae/weed that has been plaguing us is covering the reef in the bay almost continuously now and as far as we can tell has started to affect the growth of some corals. We hope that this won't be permanent and that with a little reprieve from the constant algae cover, it will start to recover.

The diving itself this month has been great with our most memorable experience being the sight of about 20 pygmy devil rays flying over the top of the formation at Wolf Rock. Looking up from a depth of 20 metres with about 25 grey nurse sharks in front of you and the devil rays covering the water above was a spectacular sight.

One of our last dives was at Round Rock and the site provided the usual excitement with large stingrays covering the bottom and several leopard sharks constantly circumnavigating the formation. A shovel nosed ray and eagle ray along with a rather large hawksbill turtle finished the dive off nicely.

Lets see what March brings. Hopefully some better weather than what we experienced last year when most of the month was written off with bad weather.

Average visibility over the last month has been about 15 metres with our last dive about 20 metres. Water temperature as mentioned earlier is between 27 & 31 degrees depending on what depth you are at.

Feb 07th 2006 WOLF ROCK DIVE REPORT

In the last few days we have been host to some youngsters who are travelling with all their own equipment and some just toting mask and snorkel. On Tuesday we took out a Danish couple that gained their Divemasters certificate while working on the big boats up off Cairns. Although they had clocked up over 80 dives on The Great Barrier Reef, they said that Wolf Rock was the best dive they had ever done. We were happy to hear this although, in our opinion, it was a reasonably quiet day at Wolf Rock. It's not the first time we've been told this and we hope that the word will spread and give other travellers another reason to make the trek into Rainbow Beach.

However the diversity of life at Wolf Rock speaks for itself - from little 'Nemo', moray eels and octopus through to large pelagics such as giant trevally, king fish and barracuda. Then we have the top of the food chain with giant groupers and the grey nurse sharks, the manta and eagle rays that never fail to impress. In all, it takes a very healthy marine ecosystem to sustain such a large array of life in one place and with Wolf Rock only a ten-minute boat ride from shore.

Visibility is currently 15 - 20 metres and water temperature 26 degrees.

Cheryl Maughan Wolf Rock Dive Centre

Feb 21st 2006 WOLF ROCK DIVE REPORT

Diving at Wolf Rock this week has been particularly good. Clean ocean conditions have provided some beautiful blue water and excellent visibility, enabling us to make an accurate count of the grey nurse shark population at the site. In all we counted up to 35 sharks. To enable the grey nurse shark to change depth, they need to rise to the surface to gulp air or they burp air out under the water. At the moment there seems to be one shark in particular that is having trouble maintaining her depth as we have seen her rise to the surface several times to gulp air.

The leopard sharks are also in abundance at the moment as well as a strong presence of eagle rays and bull rays. In all some very impressive diving.

Current water temperature is 27 degrees and visibility 20 metres.

Feb 28th 2006 WOLF ROCK DIVE REPORT

Not much opportunity for diving over the past week due to the strong winds and swell which developed last Wednesday. Our last dive was pretty spectacular though and has made some lasting impressions on our divers. Our last count of sharks was around the 30 mark and today's picture will give you an impression of the what it's like to be in the water with so many of these animals.

Peter Pflugl who dived with us throughout December and January took the pictures you see here today. The diver in the photo is Peter's wife, Elisabeth who figures prominently in all Peter's photography. In this way it gives people a reference point in comparison to the photo subject, in this case the grey nurse sharks. It takes a very skilled photographer to put himself in the best position to get photos underwater and just, as much skill is required by the model to present the photographer with the right angles without scaring the marine life away. Peter and Elisabeth work very well together, almost like they have a telepathic connection. Sometimes they are also working with very strong currents and surge so your fitness level needs to be pretty high.

When last out diving the water temperature was 27 degrees and visibility 20 metres.

Well, we all new the run of good weather was too good to last. Unfortunately the month has finished with some rather strong southeasters with big swells so not much diving has been achieved for the past week or so. Before that however it was business as usual.

The dives have been nothing short of spectacular and we have been blessed with calm conditions and good visibility. All the better to see the myriads of different fish species not to mention all the big stuff. Grey nurse sharks left right and centre, eagle rays flying overhead in squadrons of up to 20, giant Queensland gropers, bull rays, pygmy devil rays and leopard sharks all over the place.

Leopard sharks turn up in quantity for the summer months probably to mate, as they are generally known as a solitary shark. When born they have stripes rather than spots hence the name which they are also known by - zebra shark. They are a particularly docile shark and will allow divers to approach quite closely. They are known to like a tickle on the underside of their belly. To look at their skin seems like it would be soft as velvet, but in fact they feel much like sandpaper.

As we head into the autumn months we look forward to some cooler weather and as the water temperature also cools, some of these species will start to move on to warmer waters.

Water temperature has been hitting the 27 degree mark and the visibility has been averaging 15-20 metres.

Feb 6th 2007 WOLF ROCK DIVE REPORT

Once again it's shark soup out at Wolf Rock. We have just entered the peak of the season and as predicted the full moon in February has brought all the sharks close into the exposed pinnacles and into shallow water. It's as if they can sense the magnetic field through the rock. For several months now we have seen one particular shark out there who is easy to identify because she has scoliosis. We're pretty sure she is pregnant so it will be interesting to see if she is here next summer. Apparently the female grey nurse only reproduces every second year.

We have also observed a lot of bull rays on the bottom at 35 metres, some of them looking decidedly pregnant. All of this leaving local and visiting divers totally astounded.

We would like to say hello to Len and Violet from Tin Can Bay who called to say that they read this report every week and encouraged us to keep up the good work, so thanks very much for the feedback guys and we'll see what nature surprises us with in 2007.

Visibility is averaging 15 metres and water temperature reached a very warm 26 degrees this week. Like swimming in a bath!

Cheryl Maughan
Wolf Rock Dive Centre

Feb 13th 2007 WOLF ROCK DIVE REPORT

Pygmy devil rays have been the stars of the show at Wolf Rock this week. We don't often see them around here and it's always exciting to see something different. They look like a miniature version of the manta ray as they have two lobes at the front of the head like the mandibles of the manta ray. It is believed that the name devil ray came from ancient fisherman who thought that manta rays were a monster of the sea because of it's appearance. The mandibles were likened to the horns of the devil! The pygmy devil ray is a plankton feeder and is considered to be quite harmless. They are only found in the northern parts of Australia probably accounting for why we don't see them that often.

We've also seen quite a few shovel nosed rays, or guitar shark as a lot of people call them, over the past week. There are two species, the white spotted guitar shark, which has a distinctive pointy snout, or the shark ray, which has a curved snout. From a distance they can be mistaken for sharks as they have quite large dorsal fins. These rays grow up to about 3 metres in length and are also quite harmless.

Visibility is averaging 10 metres and water temperature 26 degrees this week.

Feb 27th 2007 WOLF ROCK DIVE REPORT

As we've come to expect this time of year the weather has been making things a little difficult to get out but we have managed a few times over the past week. Despite a bit of swell hanging around for about 2 weeks or so the conditions under the water have been surprisingly good.

A lot of the big critters have been in short supply but lots of other things to see and amuse us. The leopard sharks are still around and the pygmy devil rays were seen again out at Round Rock and we got up close to an eagle ray that was feeding on the sandy bottom. I thought he would take fright when he saw us but seemed unperturbed as he casually swam away to look elsewhere. Some large schools of giant trevally and kingfish have also been hanging around with lots of turtles at both Wolf Rock and Round Rock.

Today's photo is of some Faulkners coral which is found out at Wolf Rock. This coral only comes out when there is a current running and is quite spectacular when you see masses of it along a wall.

Visibility has been a consistent 15 metres and the water temperature has dropped to 24 degrees.

As we come to the end of summer I would have to say, it hasn't been a typical few months. It seems just when we think we can predict what the grey nurse shark are doing they change their habits. We did see some big numbers at the beginning of February but that has dropped dramatically over the past 2 weeks. They were also late in arriving this summer compared to last year. We'll just have to wait and see what they do over the next year.

Pygmy devil rays have been frequenting both Wolf Rock and Round Rock over the month. We don't often see them around here and it's always exciting when you spot something different to the norm. They look like a miniature version of the manta ray as they have two lobes at the front of the head like the mandibles of the manta ray. It is believed that the name devil ray came from ancient fisherman who thought that manta rays were a monster of the sea because of its appearance. The mandibles were likened to the horns of the devil! The pygmy devil ray is a plankton feeder and is considered to be quite harmless. They are only found in the northern parts of Australia probably accounting for why we don't see them that often.

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The leopard sharks are still around and we got up close and personal to an eagle ray that was feeding on the sandy bottom. I thought he would take fright when he saw us but seemed unperturbed as he casually swam away to look elsewhere. Some large schools of giant trevally and kingfish have also been hanging around with lots of turtles at both Wolf Rock and Round Rock.

As usual for this time of year the weather has been making things a little difficult to get out with a bit of swell hanging around for about 2 weeks or more. Even so the conditions under the water have been surprisingly good.

Visibility has been an average of 15 metres throughout the month and water temperature started at 26 degrees and has dropped to 24 degrees over the last week. Still very warm but quite cool for this time of year.

Again it has been a pretty quiet month due to weather but there has been some improvement. The water visibility is slowly clearing and we're now experiencing between 5 and 10 metres under the top layer of water which is still quite dirty. The grey nurse sharks are moving into their usual summer patterns and on our last dive there were quite a few sea snakes swimming around, investigating rocks and coral patches for any likely sources of food. A couple of eagle rays put on a bit of a ballet show up in 10 metres at the end of one of our dives, with one of them finishing off by doing a slow swim past the divers to have a closer look at us.

The monsoon trough is still making it's presence felt so looks like more bad weather on it's way unfortunately. With the weekend nearly here it looks like blowing 30 knots again. How does that saying go? What comes after 2 days of sideways rain and wild weather? Monday!

Water temperature is a comfortable 25 degrees.

The last weekend of February finished with some pretty warm temperatures out at Wolf Rock, 27 degrees which is about as warm as we have ever experienced here. Maybe that's why the grey nurse sharks have been a bit scarce. We are seeing them intermittently but not in large numbers as we normally do.

Still lots of other animals around however for everyone to look at and admire. Leopard sharks, wobbegong sharks, turtles, groper, barracuda, painted crayfish, sea snakes, lionfish...well I think you get the picture. After diving here now for over 8 years we sometimes get a little blasé about what we see but customers always remind us of how special it is with the excitement they show after a dive.

I do have to say though, I was a bit envious of Dolphin Ferry Cruise with their reports last month on sightings of dugong. Now that would be something to see. I know in other parts of the world there are places that dive with these animals every day and the dugongs love interacting with the divers. Maybe I should clarify that, dugong is only found in Australian waters whereas other countries have Manatee, a close relative. They also mention that there are approximately 2000 remaining in the Great Sandy Strait and I know that they are also found in Moreton Bay where the population is estimated to be around 850. They are listed as "vulnerable to extinction" by the World Conservation Union.

Visibility has averaged about 15 metres throughout the month and water temperature is still a very warm 26 and 27 degrees.

February was a bit quiet with the arrival of unsettled weather but when we did get out diving we weren't disappointed. Highlights of the month have been loads of sharks, a 3-4 metre manta ray and a giant mottled eagle. The giant mottled eagle ray is like an eagle ray on steroids and this is only the second time I have ever seen one. It has wavy dark stripes on its back and it's head is about the same size as a 3 metre shark with a wing span of 3 metres. Visibility has been 15-20 metres and water temp still pretty warm at 24-26 degrees.

Following on from last month's story about nudibranchs: The nudibranch's lifespan can be as little as 3 weeks or as long as 1 year but the average is about 4-6 months. Finding mates is not a problem as they are hermaphrodites, able to change sex so each nudibranch is capable of breeding. They lay egg masses which they attach to a reef formation and when the eggs hatch they drift in the current until they latch onto a food source.

Nudibranch's play an important role in marine ecology as they help keep our reefs clean. They do not have predators as they are poisonous to eat and this is signified by the multitude of bright colours that they come in. If a fish does try to eat one, they'll spit them back out pretty fast.

While Gary was diving with us he found 4 different species at Wolf Rock and another 12 on Nursery Reef. One of these was the *Goniodoridella Savignyi* which is not normally found north of Noosa. The average diver will probably never see it as they only grow to a maximum of 7mm.

Gary works closely with Dr Richard Willin of the Darwin Museum for the purposes of identifying any unnamed species. The Darwin Museum has a wet museum where every species of underwater animal that can be found in the world is kept. The Museum is fire, hurricane, cyclone and flood proof.

Again, if anyone is interested in more of Gary's work you can visit his website at www.nudibranch.com.au.

February – let me see, what has happened this month. A bit of bad weather, more flooding throughout Australia, devastating bush fires in WA, a category 5 cyclone up north and an earthquake in Christchurch. You'd be forgiven for thinking it may be the end of days. Seriously though, whatever is going on I think we have had enough for the time being thank you very much.

In between bouts of unsuitable boating weather locally we did get some diving in. Loads of sharks are congregating out at Wolf Rock as they do this time of year. Unfortunately though we did find one shark has a gaff embedded in her stomach. We are hoping that it might be possible to remove it but some further investigation needs to be done to see how deeply embedded it is. Another shark has a pretty nasty deep wound down her left side which looks like it may be infected and her pectoral fin has also been damaged at some stage. At the moment she is not looking very well and compared to the other sharks is quite skinny and lethargic. Hopefully this is just temporary and she will recover. Another shark we have spotted out there this month is "Smiley" who we first saw 2 years ago. Poor Smiley has a deformity of the jaw which has resulted in her gums and teeth being permanently bared a bit like she is constantly smiling, well either that or about to eat something. She looks very "happy" and healthy though so it is not impacting on her lifestyle. Nice to have her back again.

Visibility has cleaned up since the flooding and we are averaging 10 - 15 metres now with water temperature a very warm 26 - 27 degrees.

This month we have had the pleasure of taking diving two young ladies from Victoria University, Melbourne who are both Scientists working towards their PHD's. Kirby (now nicknamed Kirby Morgan because she's tough just like the equipment) has been conducting more research on the behaviour of the grey nurse sharks and their interaction with divers. She has already worked at sites in New South Wales such as Southwest Rocks and Byron Bay and will be visiting one other site for her observations before she finishes her PHD in February next year. Sylvia, who is doing her PHD on sea lions, was helping out for the time being as Kirby's usual assistant was not able to join her for this trip.

While here they enjoyed the opportunity to witness the amazing array of marine life we have in our back yard including the dolphins at Tin Can Bay. Despite her study of sea lions, Sylvia has a secret passion for dolphins and her comment on the feeding of them at Tin Can Bay was that the volunteers were doing a very professional job of managing the project and that the impact on the dolphins here seemed to be quite minimal. So that's great news.

On a more disappointing turn of events, Gabe Watson has been acquitted of his capitol murder charge in Alabama. It is very likely that he is guilty of this charge however a jury of his peers will not get the opportunity to decide. As professional divers we have had to manage inexperienced and panicked divers under the water in all sorts of circumstances. The thought of him abandoning his wife when she was in difficulty under the water, according to his version of events, is beyond our comprehension. He claimed that he had not received any training on how to rescue a diver despite the fact that all his training had been documented including the various rescue scenarios he would have performed on course. That he also took an extended length of time to arrive at the surface from only 15 metres of water to call for help is also beyond our comprehension.

Diving conditions this month have been extremely good and we have been looking at just about everything possible to see out at Wolf Rock including octopus, sea snakes and leopard sharks.

Water temperature 26 degrees and visibility has been a quite consistent 15 metres.

Unfortunately there has been no diving this month due to bad weather conditions. However as a result of the weather we have been busy with mooring installations and repairs.

There have been a few broken moorings which have created a few problems for other mooring holders. If you have a mooring it's extremely important to have your components checked by qualified commercial divers to ensure the safety of not only your own vessel but the vessels around you.

When we are doing these mooring inspections you would also be surprised at what sort of marine life we come across. It's not unusual to find turtles having a nap on top of a mooring anchor and Kev has had to fight off the odd sea snake or sand crab. Some vessels even have their very own eco system growing right under their hulls with loads of hard and soft corals that are home to all sorts of tiny animals.

I still find it a lot more exciting though when you come face to face with the big stuff at Wolf Rock. To give you some perspective, the grey nurse shark in this photo is about 3 metres long and the bull rays measure about 2 metres across the body.

Some brilliant diving over February this year has kept customers raving about Wolf Rock and what a fantastic dive we have here.

With improved visibility we have been enjoying the entire vista of Wolf Rock under water surrounded by about **50 grey nurse sharks**, giant Qld groper, eagle rays, bull rays, turtles, octopus, leopard sharks and so much more. In amongst all these animals are huge schools of baitfish, trevally, kingfish, barracuda and mulloway.

To see more photos and comments about the dives at Wolf Rock go to our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/wolfrockdive

Visibility has been in the range of 20 - 30 metres with water temperature 25 degrees.