



# Seal Rocks 2010

Another Fantastic TUG Trip -  
Story by Grant Bradly [www.mydiveholidays.com](http://www.mydiveholidays.com)

*Friday, February 19 – Campground*

## 9:30 pm

Paula and I finally arrived at the Seal Rocks camp ground. Despite our efforts to sneak into the camp we were spotted by our friends who had arrived much earlier, set up their tents and had wine and dined. Even before we could get out of the car we were surrounded by armchair experts on tent erection. Robb and Fritz even provided an additional challenge by hiding some of our tent poles. Not to be put off our accommodation was soon up and ready for occupation.

Not before too long we were able to relax and enjoy a beer with the others. We were reminded of the early dive planned for the next day so were soon off to bed to get some rest.



*Saturday, February 20 – Satara Wreck*

## 7:00 am

By 7:00 am we were at the beach car park readying our twin tanks and cameras. When [Nick from Foster Dive](#) arrived we made our way through the surf to board his boat. The surf was a little challenging and a few divers lost some gear. Most of it was recovered. However, Fritz managed to lose his car keys and decided to stay behind and wait for the NRMA service to access his vehicle. Paula fell under the weight of her tanks when knocked by a wave and injured her left knee.





Photo taken from [www.myall-lakes.com/satara.html](http://www.myall-lakes.com/satara.html)



## *Saturday, February 20 – Satara Wreck* **8:00 am**

By 8 am we were anchored at the Satara dive site located south of Big Seal.

The SS Satara sank in the early hours of April 20, 1910 after grounding on the Edith Breakers. The now 100 year old wreck lies on a sandy bottom at a depth of around 41 meters of water. She is lying on her port side with her bow pointing out to sea and her stern inshore resting on a reef.



Paula and I concentrated our excursion to around the stern of the vessel. Here a large prop with two metre blades provides wonderful photographic opportunities. Large schools of morwong and the occasional king fish hovered about us. The trip conveners, [Neil and Lyn Vincent](#) also concentrated on this area.

Other members of our team explored seaward past the boilers and beyond. Out from the boilers the wreckage flattens toward the sand. With such great visibility of around 40 metres some divers made an excursion out from the vessels port-side where another boiler rests. It was apparently blown clear as the vessel went down. This is a big vessel and warrants several excursions which happily we were able to accommodate during the weekend.

Our decompression obligation was a breeze in the 24 degrees C water temperature.

Before long Nick had us back disembarking at Boat Beach. The smiles on our faces were evident to our dive companions who were readying themselves for a double reef dive.

**2:30 pm**

### **Afternoon Dive**

The morning smiles were reciprocated by those returning to shore. Stories of large numbers of grey nurse sharks deafened our ears. We could hardly wait to get out there.

South West Rocks, NSW is the only other area I have seen somewhere near this many sharks in the one spot. These guys were all around us and just floated by as though we weren't there. They were very inquisitive. Michael Match was a little unnerved by the behaviour of several sharks intent on investigating his re-breather at very close quarters.

Paula and I found ourselves a great position to take photos and observe the shark/diver interaction. On several occasions we witnessed several sharks positioning themselves behind divers as though they were trying to look at what the divers were looking at. They probably were.

Several times I looked behind me to see if Paula was having the same experience only to be fronted, at very close call, by white pearly teeth. Interestingly, my camera's large dome port seem to provide amusement to some of the sharks. I was unsure if they were looking at their own reflections or were attracted to the dome's shine.

A three metre male passed close to the dome several times. I hoped this attraction was just inquisitiveness on his part, particularly after noting the sexual foreplay bite marks on several of the nearby females.

**5:30 pm**

The campsite was abuzz with the days diving stories. Nothing like a beer, a BBQ and some great buddies to make your day. We were all looking forward to repeating it on Sunday. Paula and I were now on the early morning Satara dive due to some vacancies.



## Sunday, February 21 – Satara

**7:00 am**

Well within an hour of leaving the beach Nick had us back out at the Satara dive site. This time we were diving with two other TUG divers who arrived only that morning.

The road trip has recently improved following the completion of the Bulahdelah highway upgrade. It is only a three hour drive from the Central Coast. Sydney is just another hour away.



### Diving

Before long we were back on the Satara wreck. As with Saturdays dive, Paula and I concentrated on the stern area. The visibility was still great but a lot of particulate, a by product of the overnight north-easterly wind, was all about us. Not to be deterred, we still managed to take some reasonable photos.

### An Unexpected Dive

The rest of the day was a little unexpected. About 15 minutes after the dive we were all set to be underway and return to Boat Beach where the remainder of our group were waiting to go out diving.

That plan suddenly changed. In a split second - at least that is how long it seemed to me - I went from being an excited diver to a being a very concerned and anxious one. My fellow divers told me later that their demeanour quickly changed as well.

I had decompression illness (DCI) and needed urgent treatment. I had lost feeling in my right knee. This wasn't a a case of a numb leg from sitting on my butt too long. Looking back, it felt like my wet suit was too tight on my right leg.

Within seconds I was lying on my side on the deck sucking 100% oxygen via a demand valve and drinking as much water as I could manage.



*Sunday, February 21 –*

**10:00 am**

Everyone went into action like a well oiled machine - as though they managed bent divers all the time. A call was made to the Diving Emergency Service (1800 088

200) and it was quickly confirmed that I was indeed needing management for DCI. The ambulance service was contacted and immediately headed toward Seal Rocks.

My diving buddies and the boat crew kept checking on me and ensured that all the correct 1<sup>st</sup> aid measures were continuing.

Despite the mild north easterly swell, Nick skilfully and smoothly brought the boat back to Boat Beach in record time.

No sooner we had arrived back and the ambulance had arrived. That is pretty good since it was dispatched from Bulahdelah, some 40 kilometres away. These guys were fantastic.

The tricky bit of my rescue was about to occur. An extremely important part of managing my DCI was keeping me immobilised and flat; to prevent nitrogen bubbles rising to and affecting my brain. How do you do that from a boat deck to the beach when you have surf and deepish water in between.

A life-ring to support me in the deeper water and an ambulance backboard from the shallower water to the ambulance will do. Very ingenious guys.

My concern at this stage was not with how they would get me to shore but that my 'bend' had now extended to my right buttock. I could not feel my right leg or right bottom cheek. How much further would it progress? I started to have a feeling that I may not get out of this situation.

Paula later told me that she thought I meant that my right face cheek had gone numb and that's why she was stroking the side of my face. It is hard talking through an oxygen mask. I thought at the time Paula was doing it to comfort me. Funny things still happen in weird situations.





*Sunday, February 21 –*

Sometime during all of the activity; IV cannulation and fluids, removal of wet suit, re-warming me etc. the ambulance paramedics called for the Westpac Helicopter retrieval team. I needed to get to a Hyperbaric facility ASAP. The nearest unit is at the Prince of Wales Hospital in Sydney and it would be a long long journey by road. The essence of successful management of DCI is quickly recognising that you have it and then moving quickly to get to a hyperbaric unit.

A one hour flight later and I was in the resuscitation bay of the Prince of Wales Emergency Department. Being confronted by a team of people is a little daunting but at the same time very reassuring. I was little concerned when after saying I needed to pass urine, one of the very caring emergency nurses wanted to catheterise me. This I guess was a reasonable response since I was not allowed to sit up. With a 'no please' shake of my head noted by the nurse, I quickly learnt to pee lying down.

The backward manoeuvre of the [Westpac Helicopter](#) in this video is amazing. Check it out.

Photos and video of the rescue and helicopter by Robb Westerdyk and Neil Vincent.



*Double Click Image to Start Video*



*Sunday, February 21 –*

Within minutes of arrival the director of the hyperbaric unit Dr Robert Turner, assessed my symptoms. By this time most of my numbness had dissipated; only a couple of areas along my right thigh were dull to needle point. He discovered that I had reduced power in my right leg compared to my left leg. Just when I thought I was nearly better, I suddenly felt not quite so good.

Rather than wait for a patient porter, Mark, one of the hyperbaric nurses and Robert transported me upstairs to the [hyperbaric unit](#). Debbie another Hyperbaric nurse spent the next almost five hours in a small but very solid tin can looking after me. Outside the chamber Mark, doctor Robert Turner and a hyperbaric technician all participated in my care. Sorry to interrupt your Sunday - a very big thanks!

**I t ' s   a   m i r a c l e !**

***I came in flat on my back***

***and I able to walk out of the hyperbaric chamber without any symptoms***

That night I stayed in the Prince of Wales Hospital's oncology unit. It was the only bed available. While appreciative of the fact that I had recovered from the 'bends' I was truly impressed by the bravery of the many people around me who were undergoing treatment for cancer. Some were looking into the unknown and ...looking for their own miracle.



### *Monday, February 22– Hyperbaric Follow-up Treatment.*

**8:00 am**

Although my DCI symptoms were resolved during the first treatment I needed to undertake further re-compression. This was to ensure that any residual nitrogen left in my system would be eliminated. The second treatment involves 90 minutes at 14 meters equivalent depth whilst breathing 100% oxygen via a bibs mask.

Although I am familiar with DCI management, I totally overlooked the fact that I would be unable to go home to the Central Coast for a couple of days. The reason of course, I would of had to go over a mountain to return home. That is not a good idea following re-compression treatment or for that mater, scuba diving. Luckily I have some great friends in Sydney, Leonie and Paul Loker, whom I could stay with. As an extra safety precaution, I travelled by boat from Sydney to the Coast - thus avoiding altitude in the days following my DCI treatment.



I am now out of the water for a further four weeks. I am happy in the thought I will soon be back doing what I love.

### *Many Lessons Learnt.*

While April 20th, 1910 was certainly a day of high drama, a day not likely forgotten for those who were involved with the loss of the Satara, Seal Rocks largest shipwreck it was certainly a day for me to remember...

## **I g o t b e n t !**

The 'bends' can happen; it can happen to anyone any time. I have been diving for more than 33 years and logged in excess of 3000 dives. I thought I was un-bendable.

I have recounted the event many times. What caused my 'bend'? Perhaps dehydration? Perhaps exhaustion? My age? Fitness level? Did I have too much alcohol to drink the night before? Was it too much nitrogen accumulation? Yes probably, to all of these factors, yet I have gotten away with it all before.

My message to you all - [get DAN Insurance](#) it may not be needed today

**- but tomorrow? Dive Conservatively!**

*Thank you to all the emergency services, diving buddies and friends for helping me*