



Merimbula 2010

Story By Emma Seberry

Terrigal Underwater Group (TUG) Trip

Getting There

A party of sixteen keen [TUG](#) members set off for a weekend of adventure to explore the underwater world off Merimbula on NSW's south coast. In their enthusiasm to join in the fun at least several had not checked quite how far it was, and were a little taken aback when they realized they were in for an eight hour journey... Nonetheless it is a beautiful drive, and we discovered on arrival that at least four varying routes all took about the same time. Accommodation had been arranged at the [Merimbula Divers Lodge](#), which has a great set up for a group of divers; two apartments that slept eight people each (ear plugs essential !), with a comfy lounge room, and well equipped kitchen. A dive shop on the premises made it easy for refills and any equipment hire required.



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Acknowledgements

Photos: Robb Westerdyk

Grant Bradly

Video: Paula Bradly

Day One – Dive One:

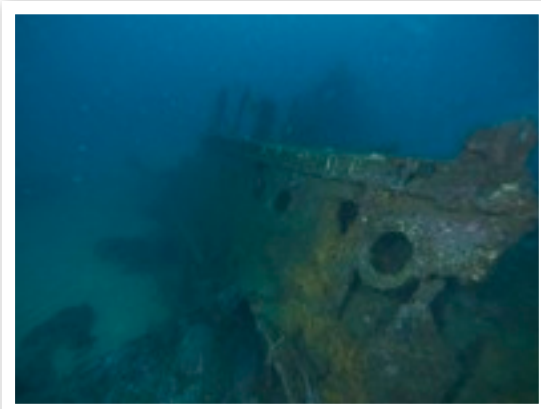
The Tasman Hauler

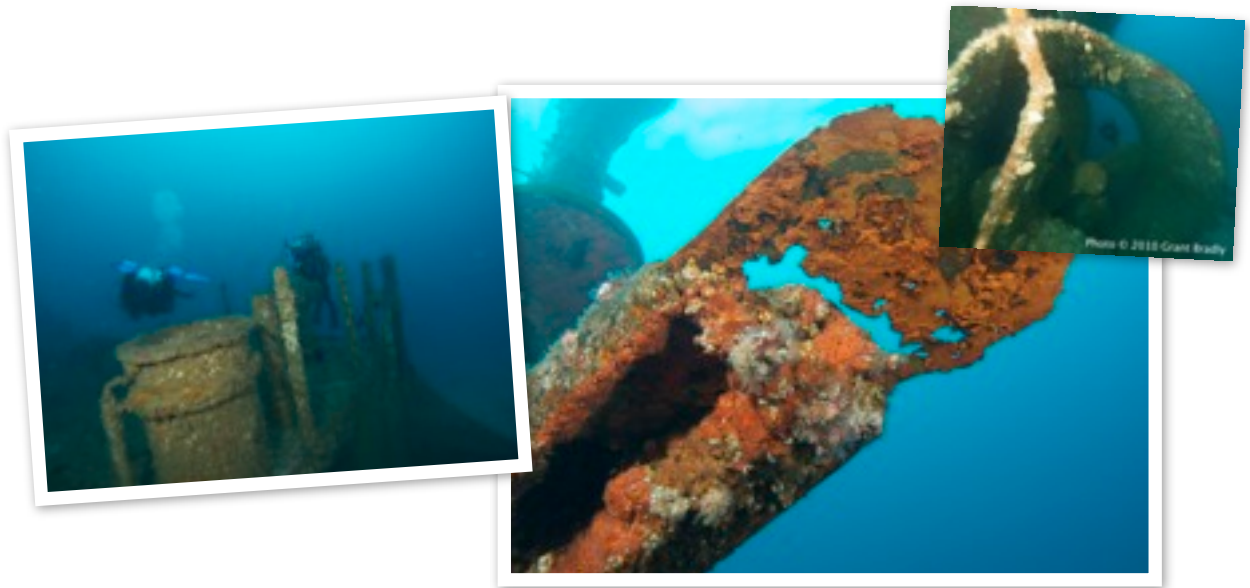
We set off for the 30 minute drive to Eden harbor to meet up with the dive boat. Our dives for the day were to be the wrecks of two tugs, the Tasman Hauler and the Henry Bolte, deliberately scuttled in 1987/88 for diving purposes.

There was lots of discussion about how chilly our dives might be (especially from those of us who had standard wet suits), and the emergence of several dry suits did little to raise our hopes on a cold grey day. One great asset discovered in Eden's harbour was the timed 2 minute hot public showers – great for filling your wetsuit prior, or warming up afterwards. Our first dive was about 20 degrees so quite bearable for everyone.

The Tasman is 40m long with hull intact, and sits upright at a maximum depth of 30 metres. The large propeller was a good starting point to explore. It is more than 3 metres across and great for photographs! In fact the entire wreck is a photographers paradise, with abundant fish life, and prolific invertebrate life covering most of the tug; jewel anemones, sponges, lace coral, and small gorgonians with so much colour everywhere. The wreck is easily penetrated, with lots of areas to explore. There is a swim through at the rear hold at the stern, and further forward is the engine room which is accessed through a large hatch. Apparently there is quite a lot to see (large diesel engine, valves, pumps and other machinery) if you like dark places (not me), so a torch is required here. There are plenty of other areas to discover internally & externally including living compartments, corridors down both sides of main deck, and two bridge levels accessed via windows and doors. It was all over a little too quickly, and before we knew it, it was time to surface, and head back into Eden harbour.

With 90 minutes to kill between dives, we all warmed up with a coffee or two, and some of the best carrot cake ever tasted at the Eden harbour Wharf-side café.



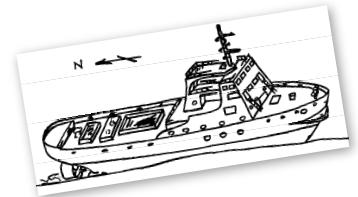


Day One – Dive One Continued:

The Tasman Hauler

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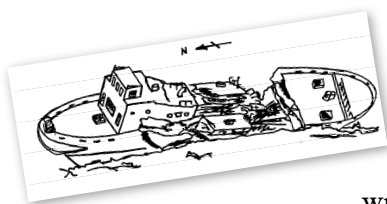
Day One – Dive Two:

The Henry Bolte

It is always a bit harder to don a wet wetsuit, but a new tug beckoned, so filled with warm coffee and some warm water from the shower, we headed back out across the bay for our second dive.

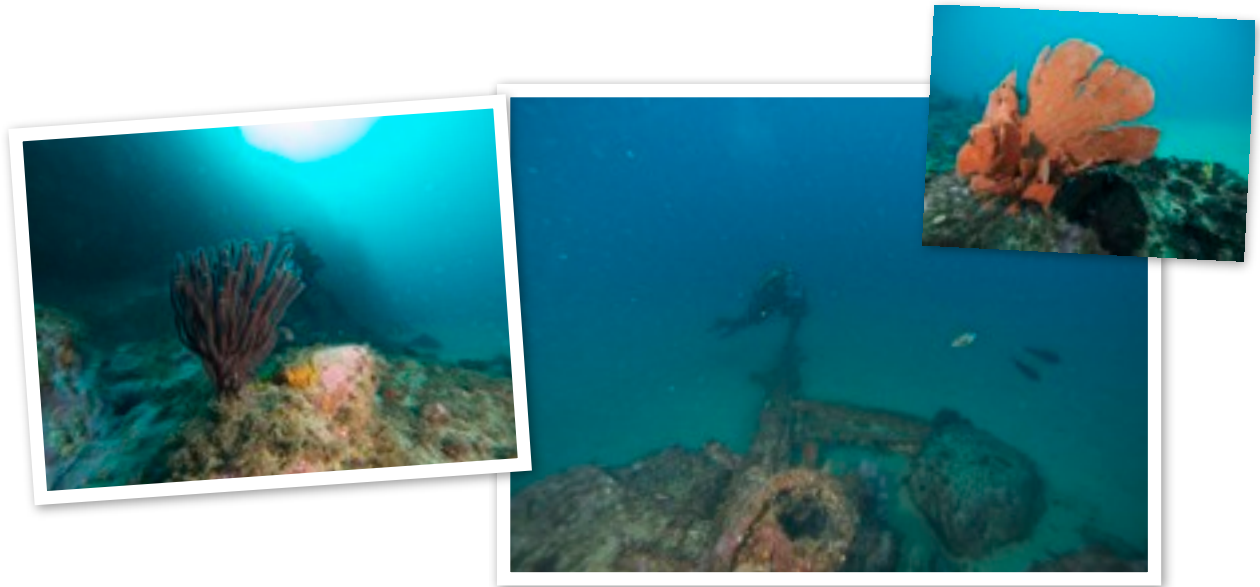
The Henry Bolte is lying at 26 metres on its port side and while the superstructure off the main deck & hull has collapsed considerably, this does not detract at all - there is still much to explore.

With a large group of divers, it seemed we were able to spread out little more on this site and find our own areas to discover. Moving along the length of the wreck there are so many nooks & crannies to investigate both internally and externally.



The propeller is huge & great to swim about. Over the length of the wreck there are several cabins, compartments to enter and corridors to swim through. On the starboard side, apparently there are a couple of toilets which I wished I'd seen - the bladder is always under pressure at this point in a dive! The bridge also has two levels which kept us all engaged for sometime finning in and out of the windows and doors.

While there is not as much growth on the wreck as the Tasman, the fish life is prolific, with many schools making the Henry Bolte their home, including a friendly group of old wives and big school of common bullseyes, who always look surprised to see you. A beautiful moray eel found a nice safe haven in one of the stacks on the main deck. A brilliant dive which everyone agreed was terrific.



Day One – Continued:

Back to the Merimbula Divers Lodge

We returned to Merimbula to wash down gear, and prepare for our Saturday night BBQ. Paula and Grant had organised a great feast, and everyone spent the night reliving the day's activities, and telling tall stories of past trips.

Day Two – Dive Three:

The Henry Bolte

A slightly colder day and more dry suits emerged, which turned out to be a good decision as the temperature had dropped a couple of points to 18 degrees down at 26 metres. Still, those braving it in wetsuits survived to enjoy their dives just as much. The sea conditions out of Eden harbour looked bleak and uninviting, with a strong wind rising a high chop. As we rounded the corner of the point in the dive boat however, the conditions were glassy and perfect for a smooth entry!

While some were not so keen to repeat a dive from the day before, it turned out to be another great experience, and as always, new things to see no matter how many times you revisit a site. The fish life seemed even more prolific, and made for terrific photography. The fish must have thought the paparazzi had arrived – there was more elaborate photography equipment in our group than at a red carpet launch. Everyone thoroughly enjoyed this dive and came up with just as many stories and excited “did you see the.....?” as ever.

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Day Two – Dive Four:

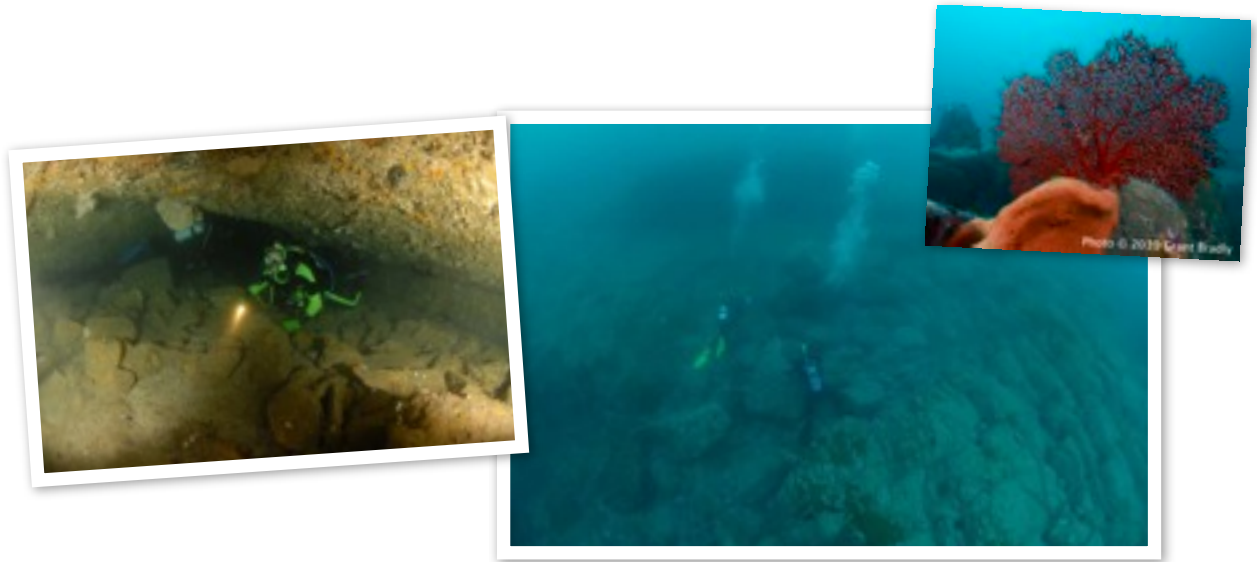
The Cave

More coffee and cake to warm up in between dives, and again we headed south across Twofold Bay and pulled up quite close to the previous tug dive sites. The boat dropped us as close to the rock shelf as possible, right above the cave, where the entrance sits at about 16 metres.

There is a great deal of life around the entrance, and nearby bommies, with lots of soft corals, sponges, gorgonian fans, and plenty of varied fish life. The entrance makes it look deceptively small, but as you swim over a sandy lip, the cave opens up to a large cavern about 4 metres wide. As you follow the tunnel it becomes darker & smaller until it is only about 1.5 metres and goes on for about a 50 metre swim to a very small exit, if you are brave enough, or small enough to get through. A combination of silting, bung torches and lost buddies resulted in no-one getting to the end that day.

The only drawback to this dive was that the cave is really only suited for a few at a time, and if any silt is kicked up, it takes a while to settle. Luckily the cliff walls make for a very interesting dive, so most of our group spent their time cruising up and down the wall which was lovely to explore with its varying levels and abundant life. Visibility was pretty good at 15 to 20 metres. A highlight was a majestic bull ray winging his way along the floor and up over the rocks of the cliffs. He was more than 2 metres in wingspan and circled around the location for much of our dive. The cliff steps up, so also made for a more interesting ascent with safety stops done while still looking around.





Evening

The weather had pretty much held off for our diving which was terrific, but finally the rain came down into the evening and we voted for a cosy night in with pizza and a few reds. The nights activities centred around a review of the brilliant photography, and a great video Paula had taken on her new camera. Robb Westerdyk kept us enthralled for hours with an impromptu presentation on the Ex-HMAS Adelaide, including photographs of all the features we hope to see at 30 metres sometime not too far away.

Day Two:

A great trip for everyone, the experienced and newbies, which ranged from 20 through to 3000+ dives. A big thank you to Paula and Grant for organising a brilliant weekend.

Emma Seberry

