

Combined Clubs Weekend 2006 – Ken Saville, Ocean Divers Plus

On the 13th and 14th of May around 50 Tasmanian divers converged on the east coast diving mecca of Bicheno Tasmania, for the second Combined scuba diving clubs weekend.

The event was run through the Bicheno Dive centre and the east coast weather didn't let us down! Winter is the best time to dive here as you get long periods of very little wind and flat waters, and best of all fantastic Vis! Diving in winter in Tassie "you must be mad!" I hear you say, but as events for Tassie divers are few and far between everyone was breaking out their gear and heading for the coast!

Most of the Tasmanian dive clubs were represented, with Ocean Divers Plus from Launceston, The Tasmanian Scuba Diving Club from Hobart, The Leven Scuba Club from the North west coast, and the East Coast Dive Club from St. Helens.

Members from the organising club, Ocean divers, turned up early on the Friday and went out with Bruce from the Bicheno Dive Centre to one of the best dives at Bicheno, The Golden Bommies. These are two ten metre high bommies, covered in yellow zoanthids, sea whips, crays and hundreds of fish, standing up off the sand at 40 metres. The vis was around 25-30 metres and was spectacular! We soon used up our bottom time exploring this fantastic dive site in the marine park, and made our way past the canyon up on to Mount Everest the bommie in 5 metres where we could do our deco.

After Lunch about 5 of us headed south with BDC to a dive site known as Muirs Rock. We all had electric dive scooters and did a fun dive zooming around this maze of swim throughs and bommies in about 17 metres, great stuff!

That night most of the club members met for a casual dinner in the Beachfront at Bicheno, to do what divers do best, talk about diving!



The Saturday morning dawned to another wonderful east coast day, and the masses converged on the Bicheno Dive Centre for a dive brief and a rundown of the day's events. This year we were also running a digital underwater shootout with prizes for the best digital shot from that day, and best Tasmanian digital shot from the last 12 months. The dive crews headed in every direction and with 50 people in the water you can imagine the cue at the boat ramp. A few headed for a great shore dive called "Blue Waters" which is just north of the Gulch in 16 metres. Most though headed to deeper waters in the Governor Island marine reserve.

We again headed out with BDC and went to a fantastic site called "The Castle" a dive that begins in 15 metres and drops over bommies to a large overhang full of bullseye fish and Boar Fish in around 23 metres the reef then runs east down into 38 metres at the sand. The reef is covered in fish and sea whips, with huge Cray fish in the cracks of the rocks. Being a Marine reserve, this is perhaps the only place you'll see such huge creatures and massive plate size abalone. Again your bottom time slips away too quickly and soon you're making your way back up the slope with vis at least 25 – 30 metres. The bonus with the castle is a long swim through cave about 20 metres long in about 23-20 metres deep, which again is packed fish and crays. Everyone reported spectacular dives and the cameras were running hot!

After the lunch break the action turned to the land with the running of the main event for the day the scuba Olympics. Teams from each club completed over 3 events, in the pursuit of the perpetual trophy which was held by Ocean Divers from last year. The first event was a navigation of a square, with 2 members given the task of walking out a square at 60 paces each side with a compass and a bucket on their heads! This made for amusing viewing as members walked in various directions in the pursuit of the perfect square. Closest person back to the starting position was Phil White from The Leven Scuba club with 2 metres.

The next event was a scuba relay where 4 members from each club race up a 50 metre track with weight belt, fins, mask and BCD. This event was soundly won by TSDC. The last event was a Spud scuba hunt from the Bicheno Break water, a place most people in Tasmania do their dive course. 55 spuds were placed in between 6 and 8 metres on the sand with members having to bring a spud back to shore one at a time. Also they were looking for a Golden 3 pound weight which was the major prize.

The event was soundly won by Ocean Divers, With Anthony Brock, bringing back 23 spuds and Peter Paulson, from the East Coast Dive club finding the golden weight.

Results were Ocean Divers 1st, TSDC 2nd, Leven 3rd and East Coast 4th, better luck next year.

The day finished with a beer and BBQ at the Bicheno Dive Centre, before everyone headed round to the Beachfront again for the presentation of prizes, the results of the photo comp, and

talks and videos from Mick Barron from Eaglehawk Neck Dive Centre on a recent dive trip to Scotland and a video on Bikini Atoll diving.

The photos were judged by leading Tasmanian Underwater Photographer, Jon Bryan, with Ed Moroni winning the best Photo from the day award with his interesting Bubbles shot. Sarah Quine won the best photo of the year with her brilliant photo of a seahorse in a sponge. Jon also awarded some other awards for some of the large amount that were entered.

The Sunday again dawned as another beautiful day. The TSDC were up early with dawn dives on offer. Most didn't rise to around 9.30 and this time we headed to a great site in the park called the Canyon. This is a large underwater "canyon" with rocks on either side rising from the rubble in 30 metres to about 15 metres. Divers can explore the many crevices and rocks that are abound with and easy deco up on Mount Everest in 5 metres. Vis this time round about 40 metres!

With this type of vis a few of us decided to do a second dive that day on the best dive site of Bicheno, The Golden Bommies. Like Friday we dropped onto these spectacular bommies and headed to the sand. This time the vis was more than 50 metres, and as Mick Barron from Eaglehawk Neck said the best Tassie diving gets! I have never see that far out on to the sand, with the surface easily seen from the bottom! Looking back at this site was just awesome with divers about the bommies, fish swimming next to them and the sun shining down, just mind blowing! Again the bottom time slips away and we soon made our way past the canyon, the hairy wall and up onto Mount Everest for our deco. With vis this good it really brought to me the closeness of all the dive sites in the marine park

So impressed with the vis that day, a few were on the phones trying to organise their next day, so they can stay in Bicheno for another days diving!

The Combined Scuba Clubs weekend was a huge success with everyone impressed by the diving and the company. Next year the event will be held at Eaglehawk neck in the south with the weekend being organised by both Ocean Divers and TSDC.

A big thank you to Bruce from Bicheno Dive Centre for all his hospitality over the weekend, and if you want some mind blowing diving, forget the cold get down to Bicheno, you wont regret it!

Thanks also to the dive community of Tasmania, especially all the retail outlets that donated prizes. Bicheno Dive Centre, Eaglehawk Dive Centre, AQUA SCUBA, Go Dive!, and Seal and Sea Adventure Tours.

Thanks also to Tooheys, Beachfront at Bicheno, Stallards Camera House and Wills The Quadrant. See you next year!

