

Parting Shot

by Peter Rowlands

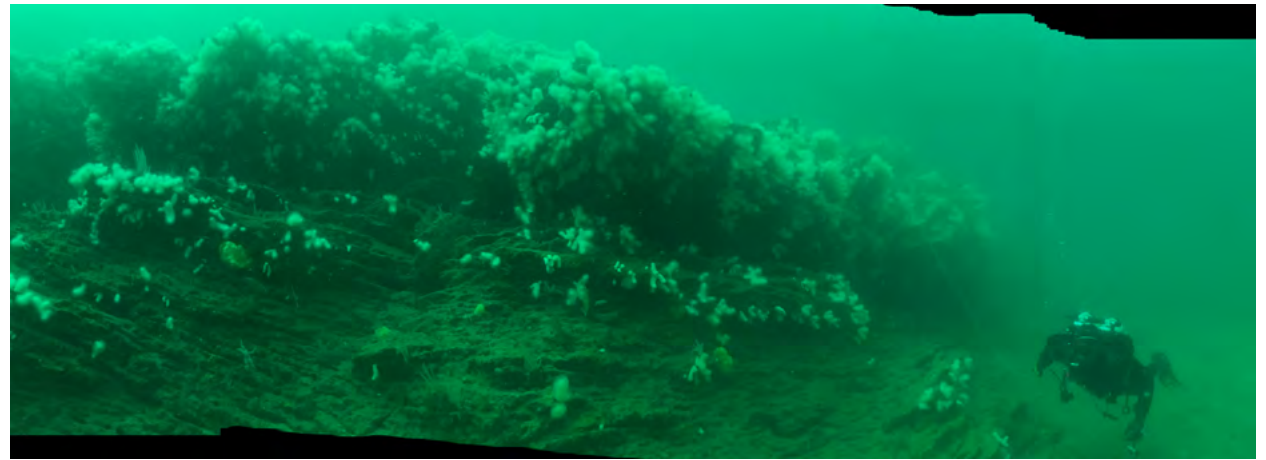
I have always been attracted to easy solutions and the panorama is a good example. Take a series of overlapping shots from left to right and then use computer software to 'stitch' them together into the final image.

Way back in 2005 I wrote about the Olympus C40 and PanoramaMaker software (UwP24 May/June 2005 which is still available to download for free) and showed how a standard lens could be used to great effect to capture a wide angle scene using this panoramic technique.

Fast forward seven years and the iPhone 5 came out with a 'Pano' capability. Rather than take a series of still images for stitching later, it allowed you to pan from left to right in a smooth level movement and the camera/phone then produced a panoramic image right there and then. For me it was a lightbulb moment and from then on I have used this feature on every iPhone I have upgraded to. As you would expect the image quality has improved with each new model but a significant improvement took place when the 5 was replaced by the 6 and it became a feature which I thought would be well suited underwater.

News of any new iPhone housing was dashed when a quick check of the specs revealed that all of the housings I looked at would only allow stills and video to be shot and not Panos. This was nearly always due to the iPhone in a housing was being 'driven' by an 'app' rather than simply touching the screen and that, whilst no one would actually come clean and admit it, was because Apple, for some weird and annoyingly Apple trait, would not release the 'code' to allow this. Even the amazing Weefine Smartphone housing which controls the iPhone in some amazing and useful ways, could not provide control for Panos.

Enter ValsTech at DEMA 2016 and, for me, a pleasant surprise reunion with Val Ranetkins, the original founder and designer of Amphibico housings who quickly dissolved my lack of enthusiasm towards his new iPhone 6 housing. I had assumed that it was the same as other housings, controlled by an app, but Val took great pleasure in demonstrating that his housing controlled the camera by replicating finger touch through the housing and thereby opened up all of the iPhone



6's features.... including the Pano! My wallet sprang open and pledged to his Kickstarter project and a year later I took delivery at DEMA 2017.

For all sorts of reasons it wasn't until recently that I was able to try the housing here in the UK and even on the first dive it became apparent to me that this would provide a ground breaking capability underwater. True the housing is ergonomically not one of Val's finest hours mainly down to how the iPhone is controlled with our fingers on land, but all that can be forgiven when it can do Panos :-)

This shot, unretouched and straight from the camera, was the very first Pano I took at 20 metres in the UK with no more than 6 metres viz. The dome on the housing restores the land angle of the iPhone lens but it is still not very wide; that does, however, play right into the capabilities of the Pano function because there is

virtually no typical ultra wide barrel distortion which even the most sophisticated stitching software struggles with.

This combination has produced an exciting immediacy back into my underwater stills rather like the instant feedback of video footage. Sure they are not much more than snaps but what they provide is a real feeling of what it was actually like down there and that, after all, is what we are trying to show our terrestrial friends, isn't it?

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If so e mail it with up to 500 words of text and yours could be the next Parting Shot.**

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and yours could be in UwP104