

Pacific Highway Treasure

by Aengus Moran

Most weekends as I dive in Sydney Australia, I am amazed at how many quality dive sites I have to choose from right on the doorstep of a city of 4 million. A short drive away it gets even better!

Highway 1 covers most of Australia's East coast and the 1025 km Sydney - Brisbane leg is known as the Pacific Highway. Several scuba diving delights are within easy reach of the visitor who has 4 or 5 days to spare.

When I need a wide angle fix I head up the Pacific Highway to the sleepy town of South West Rocks, launch pad for a fantastic dive location called Fish Rock.

South West Rocks is a 5 hour drive from Sydney, 6 from Brisbane and outside holiday time it's not a difficult drive as most of the route is multi-lane freeway. With a spare driver and several refresher breaks the time passes quickly.

Fish Rock and nearby Green Island are critical habitat areas for the placid Grey Nurse shark (Raggy Tooth / Sand Tiger – *Carcharias taurus*), which live there in large numbers nearly all year round, but the small island of Fish Rock has an additional attraction, a cave of more than 100 metres long (300ft) that runs right through the islands centre!

From the deeper entrance at 24 metres, the Cray and Lobster filled cave runs to a shallower end at 12 metres. Shots of silhouetted Grey Nurse



Staying low and to the side and the Grey Nurse Shark (Carcharias taurus) will come to you. 22mm, 1/60th sec @ F/6.3 . Canon 350D, EF-S 10.22mm, Ikelite housing / 8 inch dome / 2 x DS-125's

(Right) Black Cod (Epinephelus daemeli) silouetted against the shallow entrance to the cave at Fish Rock. 10mm, 1/60th sec @ F/3.5. Canon 350D, EF-S 10.22mm, Ikelite housing / 8 inch dome / 2 x DS-125's

sharks framed by the cave walls at the shallow end are well known to most Aussie divers but the prized shot is to light a Grey Nurse inside the shallow end of the cave.

The resident Grey Nurse and Wobbegongs are accustomed to divers so relaxed breathing, staying low and to the side generally results in a close encounter. That said, care needs to be taken when entering at the deep end as a 2 metre Wobbegong and a similar sized Bull Ray like to interchange as the gatekeepers and can be found sitting still and silent on the bottom of the rocky entrance.

Fish Rock is located just over a kilometre off Hat Head and with deep waters on either side



(frequently busy with migrating Whales), the island is a magnet for fish life. When the sharks aren't at the shallow end, the thousands of eastern Pomfret can be used as a frame for a diver or if you're lucky, one of the many but shy Black Cod.

My best buddy at this site is my EF-S 10-22 and on several occasions, curious sharks have come so close I can't fit them in at 10mm's. The wide lens is also needed for the resident Loggerhead Turtle that will swim past within arms reach totally ignoring you.



The Grey Nurse Shark is protected in New South Wales, yet fishing is still allowed at the aggregation sites. 10mm, 1/200th sec @ f/6.3 . Canon 350D, EF-S 10.22mm, Ikelite housing / 8 inch dome / 2 x DS-125's

Like many rocky Islands, Fish Rock is surrounded by long gutters and steep walls that help to funnel the action towards the photographer, large Bull Rays routinely cruise the gutters and one should occasionally look up in case a school of White Spotted Eagle Rays or a Manta Ray come by.

While the Grey Nurse Shark is protected in the Australian state of New South Wales and Fish Rock is identified as an Aggregation site for the species, recreational fishing

is allowed around the island and unfortunately it is common to see sharks with hooks and trace attached.

So now I've let you in on one of our treasures, next time you visit Sydney for business, or maybe transit Brisbane on your way to PNG or the Solomons, maybe think about a road trip for a Wide Angle fix to Fish Rock!

There are a number of other notable dive locations along the Pacific Highway. Nelson Bay, a couple of hours north of Sydney



Fish Rock is home to 10's of thousands of Eastern Pomfret (Schuettea scalaripinnis). 22mm, 1/125th sec @ F/4.5. Canon 350D, EF-S 10.22mm, Ikelite housing / 8 inch dome / 2 x DS-125's

provides some of the best macro opportunities in New South Wales. It is practically impossible to dive the Pipeline dive site without seeing Whites Seahorses and Tiger Pipefish and all of the area's dive sites (mostly shore dives) are renowned for their large variety of nudibranch.

Coming South from Brisbane and 2 hours short of South West Rocks, The Solitary Islands National

Park provides arguably the best all-round diving in New South Wales. North Solitary Island is the pick of the islands and a location where I struggle with lens choice. Subject matter here varies greatly dependant on the seasons and ranges from Manta Rays to Manta Shrimp and thousands of Anemone fish.

For more information, visit South West Rocks Dive Centre,

www.southwestrocksdive.com.au

Dave Harasti's website

www.daveharasti.com/nelsonbay

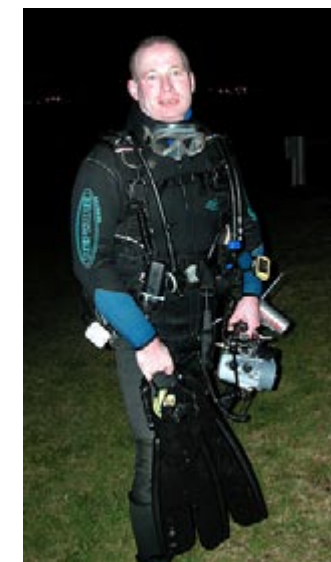
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