

Parting Shot 1

Sometimes events conspire to work against you and make life harder than it should be. Cameras and housings are not immune to this, and non-photographers would say that by carrying underwater camera gear you are heading for a diving life full of frustration and disappointment.

Sometimes it's a self-induced error like forgetting to take off the lens cap before jumping in, but other times the camera or housing refuses to cooperate and the pre-dive photo planning is binned. Or is it?

This black and white image of my buddy shining his torch on one of the casement guns of the Markgraf certainly would not have existed if the dive had gone to plan.

For those who have never heard of Scapa Flow, the Markgraf is just one of three examples First World War vintage German battleships. The wreck is big, inverted and sitting in 44 meters of water - a wreck diver's personal nirvana. As she sank she rolled over and embedded her superstructure in the seabed, so if you want to see anything other than acres of hull the dive plan calls for a visit to the seabed. This is where things went wrong.

The casement gun would make

a good subject and off came the dome port cover, flash guns fired up and aperture set to F4.5 with a shutter speed of 1/20th. Even at these wide open slow speeds the settings still yielded a black image, so I pressed the ISO button and selected 400. From this point on, neither aperture or shutter speed could be changed - the ISO button had jammed down.

From a depth of 44 meters 'just popping back to the surface' to sort the problem out was not an option. The lens would focus and the camera take a picture, but there was no preview available (just like film - remember that?) and no other settings (except the ISO value) could be changed.

I can't imagine that the Nikon engineers had the foresight to imagine the scenario I now found myself in but the camera could still work at a very basic level and take a picture. Narcosis slowed the thought process but a plan was formed; turn off the strobes, bracket every frame on the ISO value and shoot as many frames as possible.

Both the light meter and image preview were not working so I had no



idea what ISO value worked but given the depth overexposure was unlikely so I shot every composition at ISO 400, 800, 1600 and the 'Hi' setting on the D200 (equal to ISO 2000). The post dive review revealed the higher ISO values did the trick.

The image is hardly perfect - grainy and laden with noise but it converts to a moody black and white

shot quite well and has been published a couple of times in the dive press. So it's better than no image at all.

D200 in a Subal housing, 10.5mm fisheye. F4.5 at 1/20th

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**Do you have a nice shot with a short story behind it?
If so e mail me and yours could be the next "Parting shot".**

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Parting Shot 2

One of the best places to observe these monster fish is off the Australian state of Queensland, especially where I live, Brisbane. Over the years I have regularly seen Queensland groper on the local reefs and wrecks and have had some memorable encounters. On one dive on the wrecks at Curtin Artificial Reef I was inside a ship when I saw a 2m long groper, but this was nothing, as right behind it was a groper almost twice the size - as large as a family car. While at Shag Rock I once observed over a dozen Queensland groper milling around the reef, possibly a breeding aggregation.

But the most common element of these encounters has been no good photos, as these massive fish are very camera shy, fleeing from divers when they get too close, memories of when they were hunted by spearfishermen.

On a recent dive at Flat Rock I was after images of the critically endangered grey nurse shark, which visit a number of reefs off Brisbane in winter and spring. I didn't want to go too wide so set my Nikon D50 up with the 18-55mm lens. I have really been surprised at how good this kit lens is for a shooting medium size subjects

like fish, turtles and sharks.

Within minutes of getting in the water my buddy, Peter, and I had encountered a school of mobula rays and cownose rays mixed together, several wobbegong sharks, an abundance of reef fish and a large brown spotted rock cod. As we moved along the reef we also encountered three grey nurse sharks, including a pregnant female, but none of the sharks came within camera range. Towards the end of the dive we came over a ridge to see a large Queensland groper hovering in a gutter.

I slowly moved closer to the huge fish, expecting it to zoom off at any moment, but to my surprise it remained where it was allowing me to get very close for some wonderful portrait shots. As I shot image after image I couldn't believe my luck that this 2m long fish was happy to just stare at me. A few times it slowly cruised up and down the gutter, followed by a group of juvenile silver trevally. I had never seen such a bold Queensland groper before and knew I had finally got the portrait shot I



The giant or Queensland groper (Epinephelus lanceolatus) is the largest of all the groper species. This uncommon fish is found throughout the Indo-Pacific region and can reach a length of 2.7m and weigh close to a ton.

Nikon D50, Ikelite housing, 18-55mm lens at 26mm, 1/80, f11, ISO 200, twin Inon Z240 strobes.

had always desired of one of these monster fish.

After five minutes with the groper it was still hovering in the gutter with us, but unfortunately we had to depart, our air was getting

low and our computers were telling us it was time to ascend from a very memorable dive.

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