

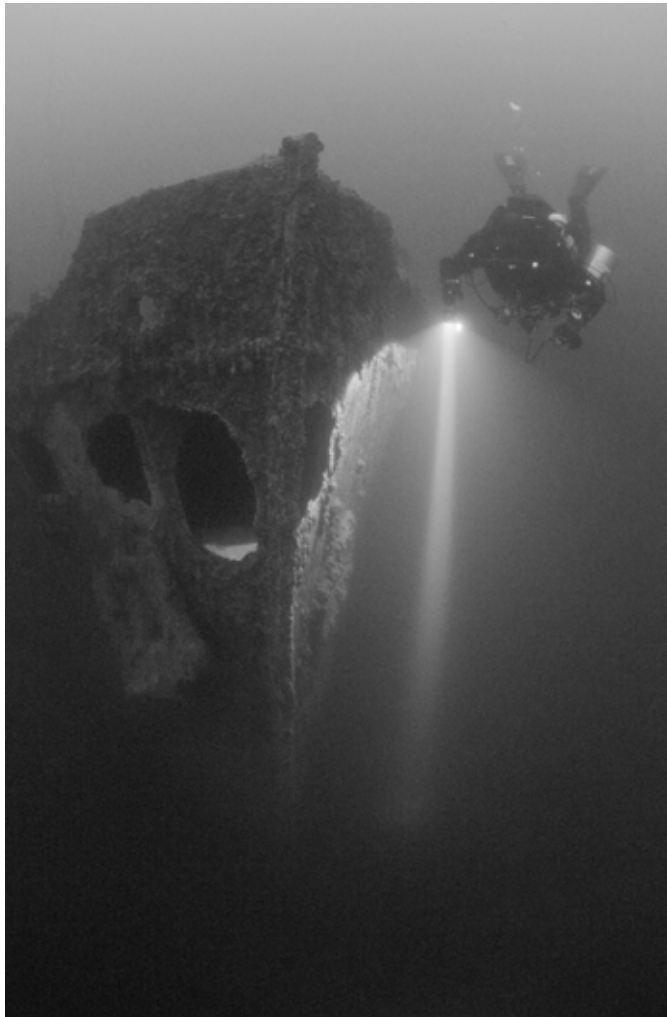
Finland wreck techniques

by Timo Ahomäki

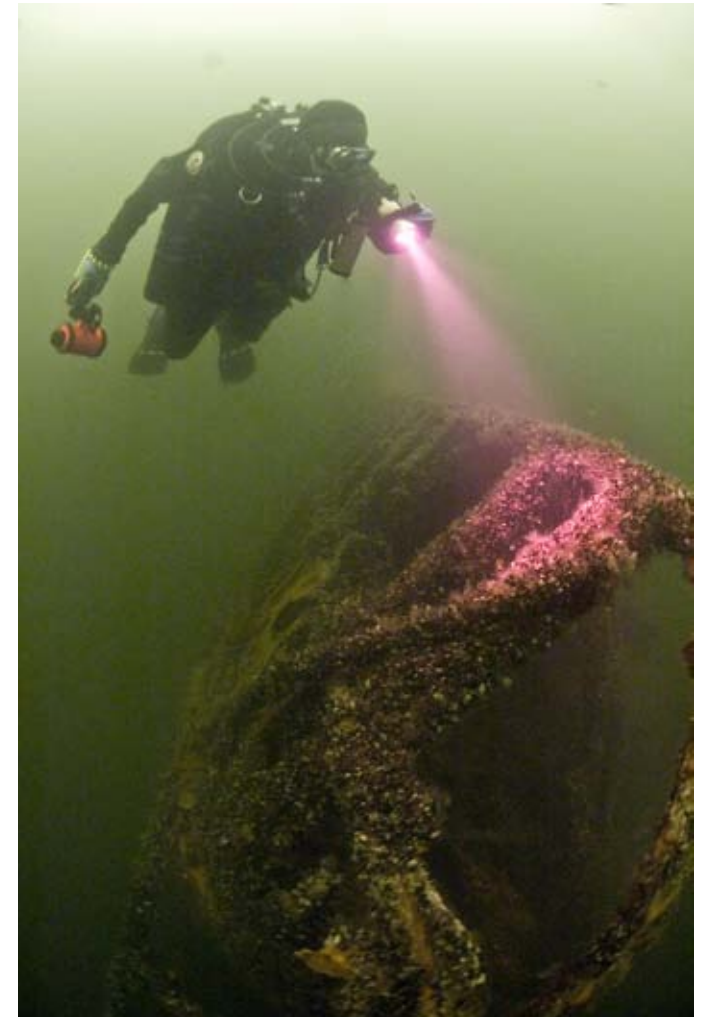
My first real exposure to underwater filter photography was on an Alex Mustard Red Sea workshop back in 2006. Learning the tricks of the Magic Filter occupied me almost totally on this trip, but I could not help but notice Alex and Paul Carre producing some absolutely stunning black and white shots of the Abu Nuhas wrecks using deep red filters. The rather dramatic contrast and almost black water in the background seemed like the ticket to shooting sweeping panoramics of some of the hundreds of wrecks that litter the murky, green waters of the Northern Baltic Sea which I call home. I decided to give the technique a shot when I got back home.

Problem being, of course, it does not work at home. For the first the water is green, not blue, and second, the real problem is not that of colour manipulation but in stead desperate lack of contrast. Basically the huge amount of suspended plankton in the water acts like a gigantic softbox, creating a non-directional and almost shadow-less light. This combined with the often quite bad visibility tends to create an environment perhaps perfect for portraiture, but much less so for dramatic shots of sunken ships.

So if a red filter does not deepen the background like it does a blue sky topside or the deep blue Red Sea water I needed to find a better one. Peter Rowlands kindly provided me with some prototype material used for the Green Magic filter



A handheld shot of the bow of s/s Belliver lying in 37 meters of water outside the Märket lighthouse in Åland. While visibility on this wreck is often excellent, the depth makes it a very dark affair. Shot just weeks after this 1911 wreck was found in 2009 with a Nikon D300, 10.5mm FE, 1/10s, f2.8 ISO3200 and a weak magenta gel, probably around 20cc. This is one of the shots that really would deserve a tripod treatment one of these days.



A diver at 22 meters at the wreck of s/s Skiftet in Rödhamn, Åland. Shot in natural light using a NikonD70s, a 10.5mm FE and a Green Magic filter. 1/10s, f4.8, ISO1600. Visibility is about 5 meters and you can already see the fins starting to disappear into the mist.



The spare anchor of the Kronprins Gustaf Adolf with the massive stock bent by the fire that sunk her. The left hand image is practically straight out of the camera, white balance and all, as for once my filtration matched the conditions perfectly. Shot with Nikon D300, 10.5mm FE and 70cc of Kodak Wratten magenta gelatins. Exposure was 30sec, f11, ISO 400. Converting the shot to black and white (right) improves the apparent contrast.

which worked quite well in good conditions for colour shots. However, this material did nothing to help the contrast, not to mention it did not help producing the dramatic black backgrounds I so desperately wanted.

After a fair number of theoretical dead-ends, lots of trial and error with available materials and more than a few emails to Alex and Peter to solicit comments and to check my assumptions I started to square on a combination of magenta and red filters. Lots of them too. However, another problem surfaced during my

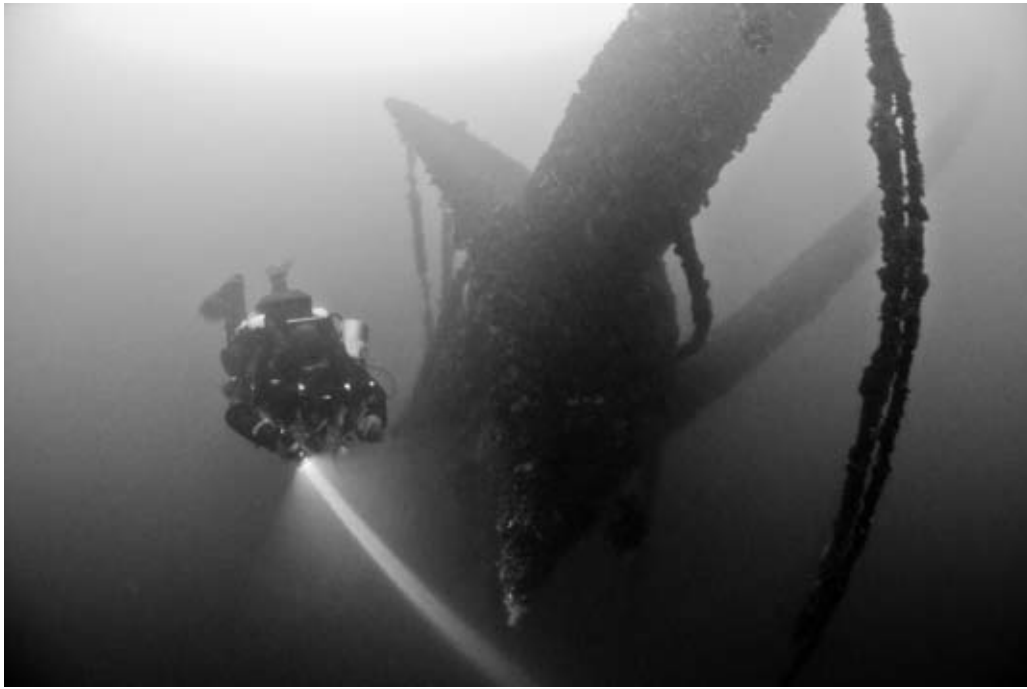
test dives. The plankton-saturated water of the Gulf of Finland changes colour dramatically with the amount and direction of sunlight as well as with the amount and probably even type of plankton suspended in the water. After trying many different combinations of red, yellow and magenta gels, it pretty soon became evident that there would not be a single, easily reproducible stack of filters to suit all locations on all days. Not even most locations on most days. Which would really not be that much of a problem, really, since I was all the

time aiming for an end result in black and white. This would give me much more leeway to use a "good enough" solution to make things practical. I could therefore concentrate more on achieving maximum contrast in stead of perfecting the colour reproduction.

With this primary need for contrast in mind I soon simplified my filtration to just different strengths of magenta, the exact amount eyeballed pre-dive on a case by case basis to achieve a pretty OK fit. As an example, using a 70cc stack of Kodak magenta gelatins I get a borderline

tolerable 30 second exposure on f11 and ISO400 at 21 meters of water on a good day. Needless to say a tripod is the name of the game here, combined with a home-cooked remote release allowing me to use the bulb setting for the longer exposures. You will need a lot since in this low light with this much filters the viewfinder is completely black and the only real way to compose is to shine a light on some of the relevant features in the frame in turn and use these spot checks for reference in composition.

For a tripod I use the standard

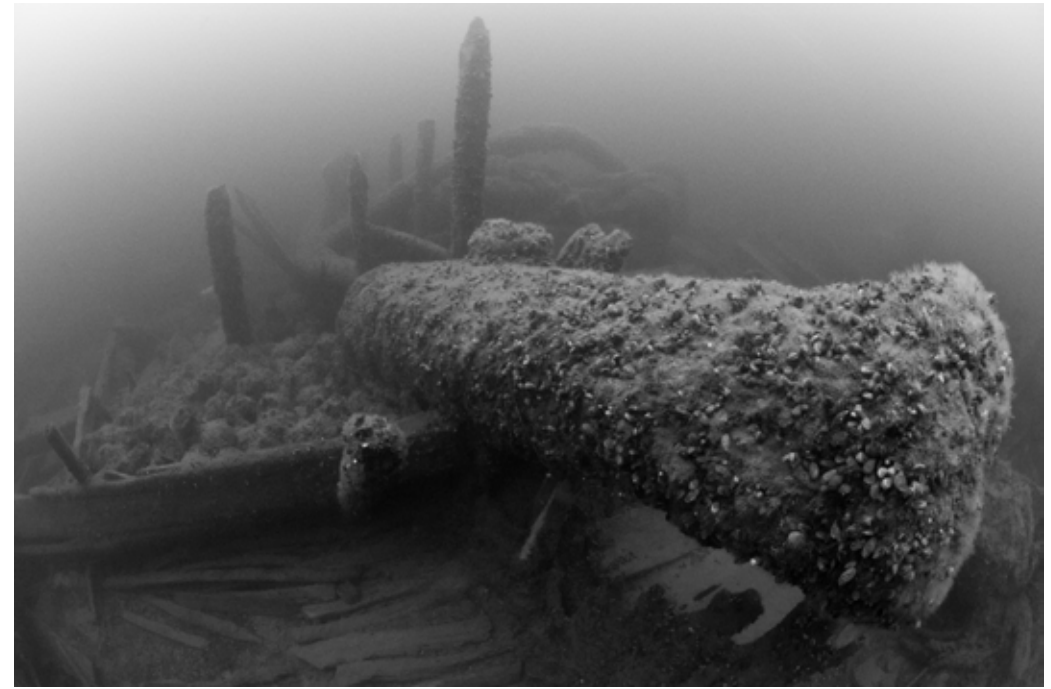


A diver at the main top of the three masted barque Plus close to Mariehamn, Åland. Shot in natural light using a Nikon D300 and a 10.5mm FE. 1/8s, f4.5. Depth of the main top is about 18 meters and to add to the pain this has to be shot against the sun to get the desired composition.

Manfrotto 055 with a ball on top to accept standard strobe arm clamps for mounting of the housing. The tripod is rigged like a stage tank when not in use. As I often carry actual stage tanks too, the tripod goes outside all the stages and an extra brick of lead to keep the tripod steady clips to the scooter D-ring in the crotch strap where it is easily accessible.

Naturally, this level of kitting up, not to mention the stupefying boredom of multiple 30 sec exposures

of the same subject, do not go down that well with dive buddies. So for more leisurely type of diving I'm these days using just 20-30cc of magenta gels. This typically gives me exposures in the 1/10 sec range with f2.8 or f4 at ISO1600 or above, which is just hand holdable. The resulting images are often a bit on the soft side and - especially if my exposures are not spot on - reasonably noisy. But I reckon it's often better with a soft image than no image at all.



The business end of a Swedish 36 pound naval cannon with a magazine of cannonballs in the background at the wreck of the Kronprins Gustaf Adolf. This Swedish ship-of-the-line that sunk in battle in 1788 in 22 meters of water outside Helsinki has been my main laboratory for filter experiments due to easy access and tons of subject matter. This image was shot using a Nikon D300, a 10.5mm FE and 70cc worth of Kodak Wratten magenta gelatins. Exposure was 15sec, f11 at ISO1600. The picture actually reproduces objects far beyond what could be seen with the naked eye in the 6-7 meter visibility.

So, why all the fuss? Why not just shoot with strobes and forget filters if it's so difficult? Simply put, I like to show a lot of the wreck and in these conditions balancing strobes with natural light can be really difficult. Not to mention that all the plankton around you tends to creep into your pictures too in the form of backscatter or even worse, as light

clouding around the strobes. Plus, there's so much less to go wrong without all those cables, arms, clamps and battery doors.

Timo Ahomäki

Queen of the Mantas

Faces of the Sea, was formed by a small dedicated group of divers who for years have been passionate about travel and scuba diving. Having lived, worked and dived some of the world's best locations, we bring together our experience and share it with you. We specialize in touring to remote and exotic destinations off the beaten path and untouched by the wake of commercial tourism.

We also put together unique and exclusive dive trips that we hope fire the imagination of those that look for something extra special. One such trip is the first manta ray research liveboard trip in Raja Ampat. We have chosen the Arenui as our base as there is no better dive liveboard operating in Indonesia today. The trip will be led by **Dr Andrea Marshall**.

Andrea was the first person in the world to complete a PhD on manta rays and aside from dramatically increasing the level of knowledge of manta rays themselves, Andrea's discovery of a new giant manta ray in 2008 was one of the largest new species to have been described by any scientist in the last 50 years. Most recently, Andrea's work was highlighted in the BBC Natural World documentary "**Andrea: Queen of Mantas**". Andrea also featured in the ITV documentary with Martin Clunes "Man to Manta".

Join Andrea from the 10th and 21st February 2012 on this special itinerary which has been created to ensure optimum time is spent with the majestic manta rays of Raja Ampat. **LIMITED AVAILABILITY.**

"To live up to the Arenui's motto of being **"The Boutique Liveaboard"**, attention has been given to every aspect of the Arenui to ensure that it fully embodies the owners philosophy of providing a unique dive holiday experience, giving you the best there is in terms of diving and leisure activities, without sacrificing any of the comforts and luxury you would expect to get from a top-notch hotel on land.

Each of the Arenui's cabins have been decorated and furnished in a stylish and inspirational manner according to a specific theme. The Arenui can host a maximum of 16 passengers who can luxuriate in exceptionally spacious cabins that are tastefully furnished with exquisite handicrafts from each of the Indonesian provinces. Each cabin, which far surpasses anything one would expect to find on a liveaboard (starting from 17 square meters), has a private en-suite bathroom and individually controlled air conditioning. A king-size bed and separate salon area assures our guests' comfort. The Arenui can be your private sanctuary and second home, but one located amidst a constantly changing tropical landscape!



Dr Andrea Marshall



While on board.

Services and facilities. On the Arenui, all amenities, such as a full range of massage and spa treatments, are included with the intent to make you feel as comfortable and relaxed as possible at all times. We constantly strive to ensure that our service is attentive yet relaxed, and never intrusive. We believe that this individual service and our personalized touches on board will make your holiday an unforgettable one.

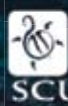
Meals. We have given the same attention to making our meals extraordinary, from the setting to the décor and choice of dishes. Rather than the typical dive liveaboard buffets, you will be able to choose from our daily A la carte menus. Our food is plentiful, fresh, and centered around local and flown-in ingredients and our internationally trained chefs then add in their own touch of magic, drawing inspiration from local and international cuisine. Even lovers of gourmet cuisine are sure to discover new taste experiences.

Leisure activities. In addition to providing the perfect setting for enjoying the beautiful surrounding scenery in between dives or at the end of the day, our Skydeck and Indoor Bars are equipped with a full range of leisure and recreational facilities such as an on board spa, a computer with internet connection, as well as an extensive selection of books and movies in our library/entertainment centre for your relaxing moments."

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