

I apologise that this is a little off topic as it is about the marine environment rather than photography but I think it raises several interesting points.

Whilst the rest of the world sinks ships on a seeming regular basis for divers to visit and create tourist dollars, we in the UK have only sunk one, HMS Scylla, and that was 8 years ago. Since then she has attracted a huge number of divers and played host to an amazing carpet of marine life. Attempts have been made to sink other ships but, as yet, nothing has happened and those involved in the process blame bureaucracy and funding difficulties as the main hurdles.

Recently I heard about an artificial reef scheme in Torbay, southwest England, which was a little different in that the plan was to create a reef of 1000 concrete balls, each 6ft wide, 5ft tall and weighing up to 2.7 tonnes. The total cost was estimated at £1.5 million. (It makes a change to talk about the humble million rather than the staggering billions which fill our financial headlines!) Anyway, what makes this scheme different is that it is not designed to create tourism income but aims show how artificial environments can encompass different aspects which can be used

for educational and research purposes.

The project would be monitored for three years during which time it would be a no-go zone while wildlife starts coming in. After that it would show what grows and what inhabits the reef. It was not primarily to attract divers like a shipwreck would but to increase biodiversity. I spoke to local dive boat owner Rick Parker who has been the driving force behind the project and was heavily involved in the setting up of MCZ (Marine Conservation Zones) here in the UK.

He described how charities such as Natural England had become like non-governmental organizations with entrenched views on the way forward. Their view was that the marine environment should be left rather than have things added, such as an artificial reef. This view isn't mirrored in terrestrial planning and wouldn't be so bad if the infrastructure of say 200 years ago still existed. Thankfully they are coming around to the idea of trying to rebuild what we once had.

Undeterred, Rick went through the process of applying for a lease of the seabed from Torbay Council and Crown Estates and also working through the process of attaining a license from the MMO, at the same time as trying to raise funding. He had

a major breakthrough recently when he was approached by TV Chef Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall who agreed to raise awareness and finance. In return his production company Keo Films would document the installation and progress of the reef balls as part of his latest Fish Fight Channel Four programme.

Unfortunately the license negotiations have become protracted and that meant the filming could not happen to suit the Channel Four programme schedule so it looks like it's all back to square one which is a real shame.

I hope Rick's determination overcomes the obstacles and that this exciting project comes to fruition.

I will keep you posted.

GoPro 3

There's no doubt that the GoPro camera, over the years, has revolutionised action video. Sure it has competitors but the GoPro is the original, the icon and it even gets a page on Wikipedia!

For many years though the GoPro was no good for underwater photography as the small front dome port on the housing gave unsharp results underwater. GoPro seemed

unresponsive to requests from divers for a version for underwater use and this allowed 3rd party manufacturers to come up with their own solutions.

These proved popular amongst enthusiasts but about a year ago GoPro suddenly released a flat port version which, although it reduced the angle of coverage, did produce very sharp images underwater and with a \$50 price tag it became the must have accessory for almost every underwater photographer, including me. Actually I got the timing completely wrong as I bought a GoPro 2 and a flat port housing about 2 months before the GoPro 3 came out!

Funnily enough, though, it doesn't bother me because the high spec of the GoPro 3, in order to get the most out of it, would mean having to upgrade my monitor/TV to 4K and my computer editing system to handle the bigger files and new editing software. Suddenly a \$400 purchase becomes \$4000.

I'm perfectly happy with 2k full HD. It provides all the clarity to impress my ageing eyes and, as I always keep banging on about, it's still the content which is the king.

Crap footage at 4k is still crap footage.

Peter Rowlands
peter@uwpmag.com