

Go Gozo

By Peter Rowlands

Before we start I must emphasise that I paid for this trip myself and was not offered nor did I ask for any discounts from anyone. OK. Read on.

Little did I realise when, in January, I booked this trip with Pete Bullen of Oceanfoto on Gozo that these dives would be some of the first I would be doing this year. Such were the relentless winter storms that I did not dive in the UK from mid December to mid April and even then the viz was shocking!

My wife Debbie and I had chosen mid May to visit Gozo with its combination of rising temperatures

but prior to the busy full on holiday season. The water temperature was a cool 18°C which for me is borderline between semidry and dry but I decided on the semidry and only felt slightly chilly towards the end of an hour long dive. This soon faded away when I emerged into the Gozitan sunshine.

Pete Bullen is an accomplished ex pat underwater photographer who specialises in small group trips of up to 4 people who want the time and space to improve their uw photography skills in an unhurried, informed atmosphere. His knowledge



Mgarr ix-Xini. An easy entry shore dive with a mariad of photographic subjects in less than 15 metres of water

Bob, the dog



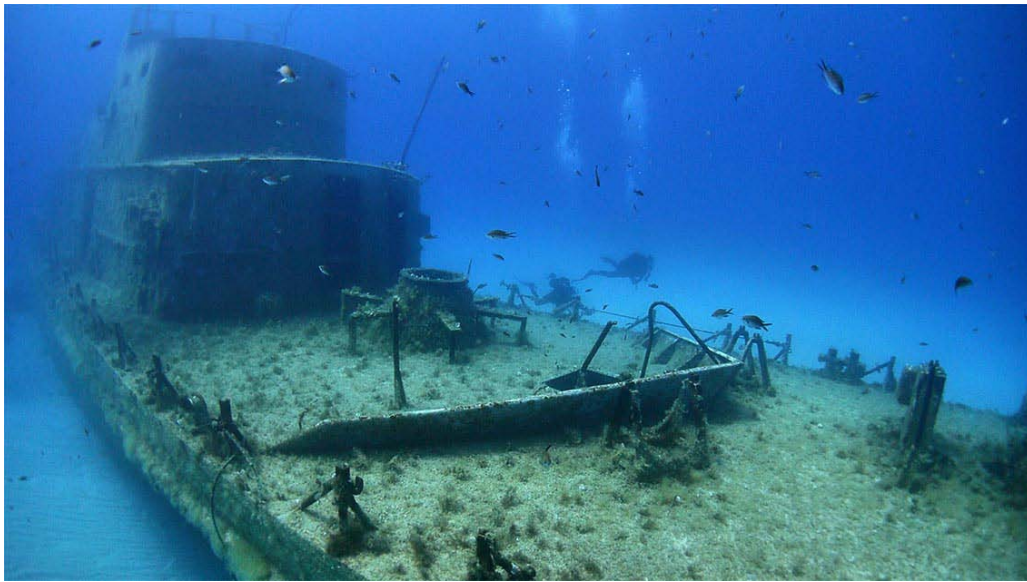


Video frame grabs. Panasonic GX7, Nauticam, 14-42 lens, INON UWL100 wide lens and dome. Available light with an Original Magic Filter.

and enthusiasm for all things Gozitan and diving is infectious and he works in conjunction with Moby Divers in Xlendi – a well run, well stocked dive school manned by pleasant and helpful staff. Pete’s partner Sue is an instructor there and then there’s Bob, the dog - a more loveable, graceful and characterful dog you could ever wish to meet. He accompanied us on all our travels and was always waiting on the shore to bark his disapproval about how long we’d been away.

The beauty of Gozo is that there is nearly always a lee shore and this proved to be very useful as on our arrival, in typical Rowlands fashion, the wind had picked up considerably and limited us to a shore dive in Mgarr ix-Xini. When I say limited, that really isn’t the right word. If I had a dive site like this on my doorstep at home I would visit it continually because, for photography, there is no better way than to become familiar with the site and its subjects. Water access is easy with very little tidal range and the viz was good.





In terms of subjects I shot octopi, flying gurnards, flatfish, weever fish, scorpionfish, wrasse and tube worms so there was plenty of subjects to practice on. Not bad for a first dive!

I was using my newly acquired Panasonic GX7 in a Nauticam housing with the 14-42 power zoom lens and the INON UWL100 wide angle lens and dome. When fitted with Stix buoyancy floats in strategic places this makes a very capable outfit to handle, even one handed, and shoot steady video. Pete could have left me in Mgarr ix-Xini for the rest of the week and I'd have been very happy but he had lots of excellent dives up his sleeve including some great scenery and cave dives in blue water.

For me the tour de la resistance

was a short RIB ride from Mgarr harbour to dive the scuttled P31. It was decommissioned in 2004 and bought by the Malta Tourism Authority who then funded everything from the planning to the actual sinking of the wreck. The 52 meter long and 7 meter wide vessel lying in about 18 meters depth on clear white sands makes this wreck a great dive for both beginner and advanced divers not to mention great for free diving. It has been cleaned and doors removed so even penetration can be carried out safely. It's a great wreck photographically with plenty of light and loads of access for different camera angles.

Probably the most famous dives on Gozo are the Blue Hole and Inland



Video frame grabs of wreck P31 off Comino

To watch a short video of the P31 go to

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EnerC4YTB68>

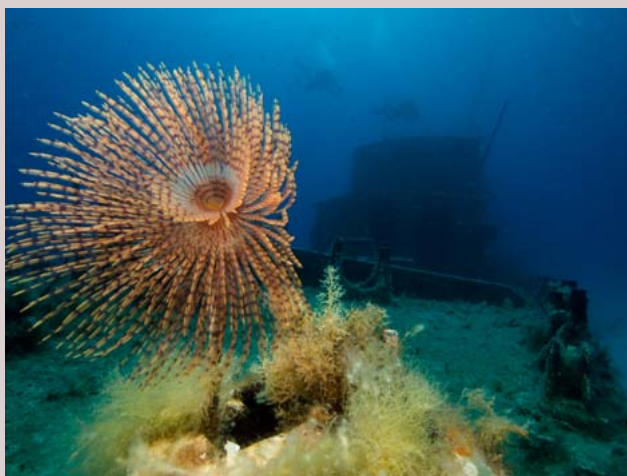
UK divers Oliver Taylor and his partner Sibylla were also on our trip. He was getting to grips with his Olympus system and I asked him to write a piece about his time on the trip:



Before

“Having recently moved from a compact to a mirrorless system, and wanting an early season opportunity to practice and improve I booked 5 days guided camera diving with Pete Bullen of OceanPhoto in Gozo.

I’m not a competent photographer but think I know what I like, sometimes taking a ‘not bad’ picture, and excuse my photography by calling it ‘reportage’. Much of my diving is with a BSAC club (London Hellfins, great club) so I fall into the no doubt familiar trap of having a camera with me rather than diving for the camera so I wanted an opportunity to get some pure camera diving with an added bonus of nice clear water after the awful UK winter and perhaps be pushed out of my rut.

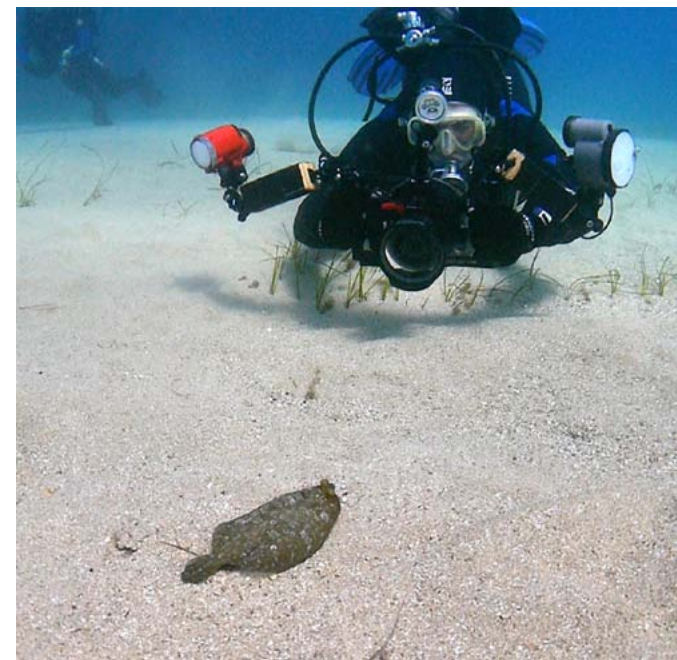


After

The diving was relaxed and un-hurried I quickly demonstrated my rut finding ability, and Pete quickly started working to help iron the ruts out. During the 5 days we worked on using a wider aperture range rather than my go-to f8 to f11, to take my time with a subject, to work strobe positions more, to improve my post-processing and looked at more formal approaches to composition

Back home some weeks on, in the murk of the English Channel I find a new ease with a subject even when club diving, I have a more solid base from which to work, and a developing sense of how I want to develop my practice.”

Oliver Taylor



Oliver experimenting with strobe positioning.



Sibylla surrounded by fish



Bob makes it known that we've been away too long.

Pete Bullen "working"



Sea. These are very impressive arches and swim throughs. Unfortunately the wind made these undiveable for a couple of days and when the wind abated the sun went shy so we dived it with lacklustre light which was a shame because they must be truly awesome on a sparkling day.

Most transport to and from the dive sites is in 4x4s and this is for a very good reason. If you thought the British urban road pot holes were bad, think again. Actually in Gozo they're not really pot holes anymore because strictly speaking they've all become joined up to become just rough

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Blue Hole on a choppy day

terrain! The word on the street is that there are only two millionaires on Gozo. One fixes car suspensions and the other repairs punctures :-)

Pete Bullen's services only cost slightly more than a standard diving package with Moby Divers and what you get for that little bit extra is a personalised service which will show in the images you return with. For anyone on the early steps of the

underwater photography ladder or for those how just want to be left to concentrate on honing their skills Pete Bullen provides the perfect level of attention.

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Pete Bullen's site
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