

Parting Shot

Over 30 years of diving I have seen some amazing marine animals, but one creature had always eluded me, the rare dugong. Living in Brisbane, home to one of Australia's most accessible dugong populations, I had seen plenty of dugongs from the surface, but never underwater. These shy sea cows are very wary of divers in Australia (unlike the Red Sea it appears), and every attempt to get in the water with one has failed.

Recently I was in Bundaberg, 300km north of Brisbane, for a weekend of diving as the area has some lovely shore and boat diving locations.

After a couple of nice macro-focused shore dives I was looking forward to boat diving the local artificial reef, only to hear from Julian Negri from Aqua Scuba, that the dive had been cancelled. Usually I would be disappointed by such news, but Julian then told me that he had encountered a dugong at a local shore diving site called Barolin Rocks that afternoon. I couldn't believe it, the boat dive forgotten I was now looking forward to a shore dive.

Early the next morning I was down at Barolin Rocks with a wide angle lens on my camera. I jumped in

the water at 7am, and with a maximum of depth of only 8m I knew I had plenty of bottom time to find the elusive mammal.

I quickly swam to the reef edge to find the sandy bottom quite stirred up, only 3m visibility. It was like a sandstorm and I knew it would be hopeless for underwater photography, but I would have been happy to just see the dugong.

After fifteen minutes I was certain that there was no way I was going to see this dugong, having done fruitless searches like this before. Just as I was thinking that I felt a presence on my right, I turned to find a very cute face with thick lips and a tiny eye looking at me - THE DUGONG!

I couldn't believe it; the dugong had snuck up beside me and was now staring at me from only a metre away. I slowly raised my camera (no time for any camera adjustments) and quickly snapped off a few photos of the 2.5m long mammal.

After swimming side-by-side for



Nikon D90, Ikelite housing, Tokina 10-17mm lens at 17mm, 1/100, f8, ISO 200, single Inon Z240 strobe

several seconds, sizing each other up, a turtle suddenly shot off the bottom and startled the dugong, causing it to kick its wide tail, turn and glide away.

I did two more dives at Barolin Rocks hoping to see the dugong again, but it never reappeared. It had

given me my brief encounter and a wonderful, if green, parting shot.

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