

Picking God's Pocket

by Alex Tattersall

Cold water diving, no thanks! Eight degree water, don't be silly! Dry suit, hood, thick gloves, and having to hold your bladder (!), you must be joking!

Wall to wall critters as far as the eye can see, yes please! A riot of colour, of patterns, of textures, I'd love to! As many unusual photographic opportunities as anywhere you've ever dreamed of, where do I sign up!

About three years ago, I attended a British Society of UW Photographers meeting where Canadian photographer Rob Bailey presented diving on Vancouver Island. In seeing his photography and excitement about the area, I knew I had to go one day. The opportunity arose for a trip a year down the line and I signed up straight away, promising my wife I'd lose 10 kilos before the trip as the physical demands of cold water diving should not be underestimated. Suddenly, I was on a plane to Vancouver, my promise sadly broken but my D7200 packed and ready.

We stayed at God's Pocket resort on Hurst Island in the God's Pocket Marine Reserve, some 40 minutes out of Port Hardy to the North of Vancouver Island. The journey was a mission across some immensely beautiful terrain. The resort itself, run by Bill and Annie was perfect, everything we needed, and the diving, just spectacular. We were unfortunate with the visibility as our trip fell at the



Nauticam NA-D7200, Tokina 10-17, F11, 1/100, ISO 320, 2x INON Z240

end of one of the longest crisis drought periods in memory, the plankton was thick and particulate abundant, most sites having water clarity in the region of around 5 metres. Others in our group who had been to the region previously lamenting the poor visibility but this was quickly tempered by the fabulous wildlife encounters to which we were soon treated.

It had been my intention to use the fisheye lens a lot more than I actually did on this trip and if I

have the opportunity to return in more favourable visibility, I'd happily spend 10 days with the wide lens. I took the D7200 and its Nauticam housing, the 105mm VR, the 60mm AF-S macro lenses and the Tokina 10-17 fisheye plus Kenko 1.4x teleconverter. I never leave the house now without my Nauticam Super Macro Converter in my pocket but as I was confronted with a whole new array of wildlife shooting opportunities, I did not really consider the kind of creative, experimental shooting

I have been trying in the tropics. I noticed also that the cold conditions, the thick gloves and resultant loss of dexterity, and the relatively brief dive times contributed to me reverting to photographic equipment and camera settings well within my comfort zone. I also took the Canon G7X compact camera with Nauticam housing and the final prototype Nauticam Wet Wide Lens (WWL) which is slowly gathering the renown it well deserves.

The first thing to strike me was the emerald green of the water, rather like we have in the UK, but the diversity of colours and subjects to place in front of this green water was astounding. Our first dive was a site like most others within 10 minutes of the resort, called 'Hooded Nudi Bay'. It was teeming with the curious *Melibe Leonina* nudibranch, much larger than I'd expected (like many things in Canada). I took the opportunity to test the dynamic range of the D7200 with some sunburst shots with some pleasing results. Attractive sunbursts with this camera are certainly a reality, no nasty cyan ring to be seen.

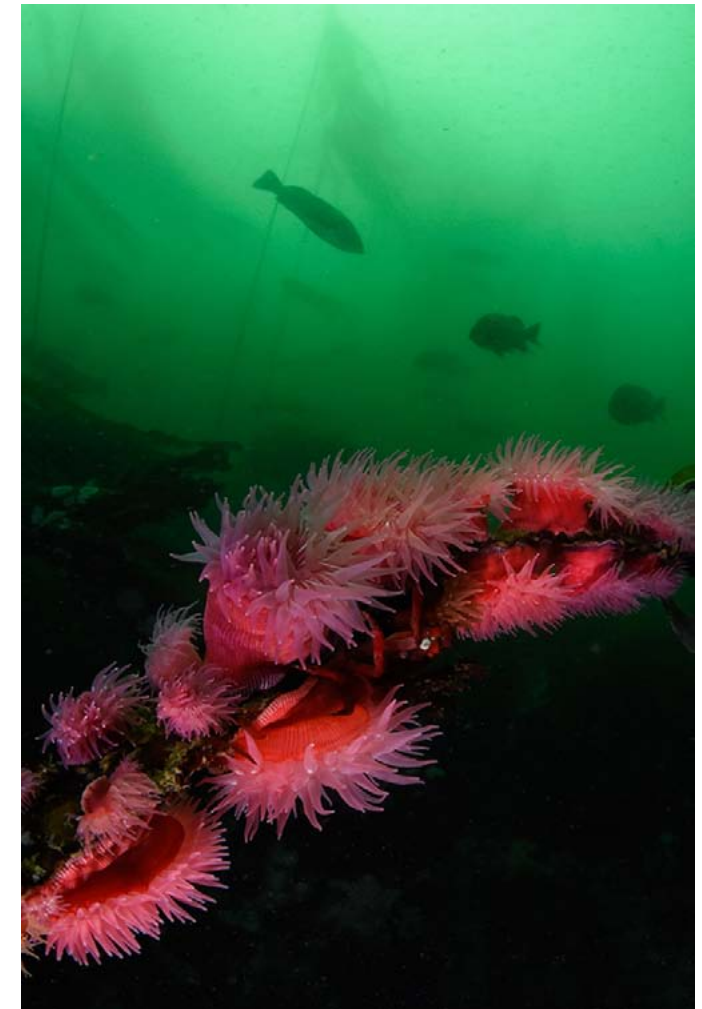
We tried some sites further along from the resort, Seven Tree Island, Barry Island, Hunt Rock, and whilst we were treated to an enormity of marine wildlife, we were informed that the visibility throughout the region was considerably less than usual. Poor visibility though I thought could be used to our advantage in producing atmospheric shots with a more mysterious feel than those created in gin clear water. The schooling Black Rock fish in the bull kelp fronds made a perfect example of this.

At Hunt Rock we saw pink and red brooding anemones colonising the stipes of the bull kelp, their vibrant colours contrasting beautifully with the emerald green of the water as Black Rock fish moved lazily through the fronds.



Nauticam NA-D7200, Tokina 10-17, F22, 1/320, ISO 100, 2x INON Z240 full power

I developed a strange fascination with the bull kelp over the first few days and decided I wanted to work a few kelp shots. We went to a stellar sealion colony one day, a beautiful trip out on the boat where we encountered humpback whales, orca pods and thousands of resident birds feeding from surface baitballs. As the sealions weren't playing



Nauticam NA-D7200, Tokina 10-17, F11, 1/80, ISO 320, 2x INON Z240

on that occasion, I spent a happy half an hour with a kelp bladder. I tried different lighting and found that a soft top lighting produced a nice glow on the circular form. I eventually found a nice specimen which even had a partner shrimp living on its surface.

Over the first two days, I noticed that the words

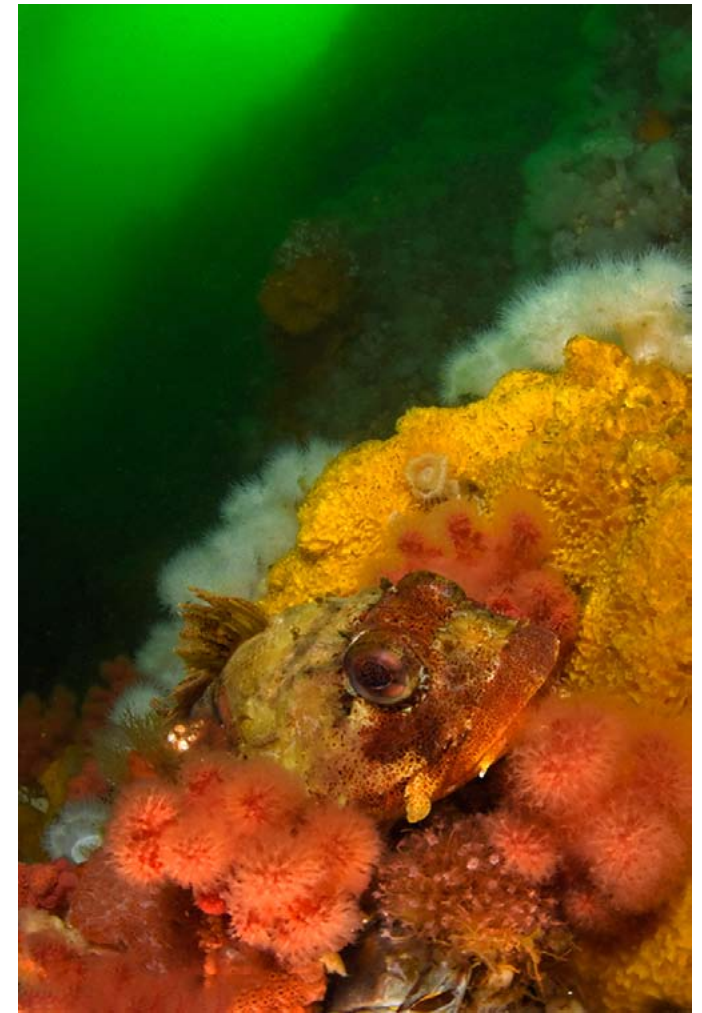


Nauticam NA-D7200, Tokina 10-17, Kenko 1.4x, F13, 1/100, ISO 320, 2x INON Z240

of Rob Bailey during that initial talk “Canada is like the UK but on steroids, everything is massive” were not an understatement. I was particularly impressed by the size and density of the nudibranch and immediately fell in love with the iridescent nudibranch. As the visibility was a struggle, the decision was made to move to close focus wide photography, using the Tokina 10-17mm fisheye and the Kenko 1.4x teleconverter with a Nauticam 140mm glass minidome.

This CFWA technique was good for photographing one of the area’s common subjects, the Red Irish Lord, a goliath of a scorpionfish but very docile.alongside some rarer subjects such as the Rock Greenling, a fascinating fish with a glowing aquamarine blue mouth which it presents when threatened.

On day three, Bill told us we had an opportunity to dive a local gem, Naquakto Rapids or Tremble Rock as it is otherwise known. The site is a



Nauticam NA-D7200, Tokina 10-17, Kenko 1.4x, F13, 1/80, ISO 500, 2x INON Z240

small outcrop in the middle of a narrow rivulet type channel. Tidal flows during spring tides can create some of the strongest currents recorded worldwide, to such an extent that the trees on the rock can be seen to shake, hence the name ‘Tremble Rock’. Currents were in our favour and the tidal range not too high for the next morning so we decided to



Nauticam NA-D7200, Tokina 10-17, Kenko 1.4x, F13, 1/80, ISO 500, 2x INON Z240

Canon G7X, Nauticam housing, WWL, F8, 1/125, ISO 200, 2x INON Z240

take the 90 minute trip, knowing that if there was any fog at the site, we would not be able to dive and would need to turn back. As we arrived, we saw whirlpools and surface current as I've never seen, but there was no fog, so in we jumped, if not a little cautiously.

The peculiarity of this particular site is its red lipped goose necked barnacles. As the water is so rich in oxygen, the blood haemoglobin in these incredible animals is intensified

to such an extent that they glow with a crimson red. Not many species can reside in such current but the goose necked barnacle is perfectly adapted with a flexible neck but hugely strong grip. I decided to take the compact camera with the Nauticam WWL attached on this dive, and took a range of shots through the useable zoom range of the camera. The sharpness of the lens is obvious, even to the corners, two INON Z240s providing lighting.

