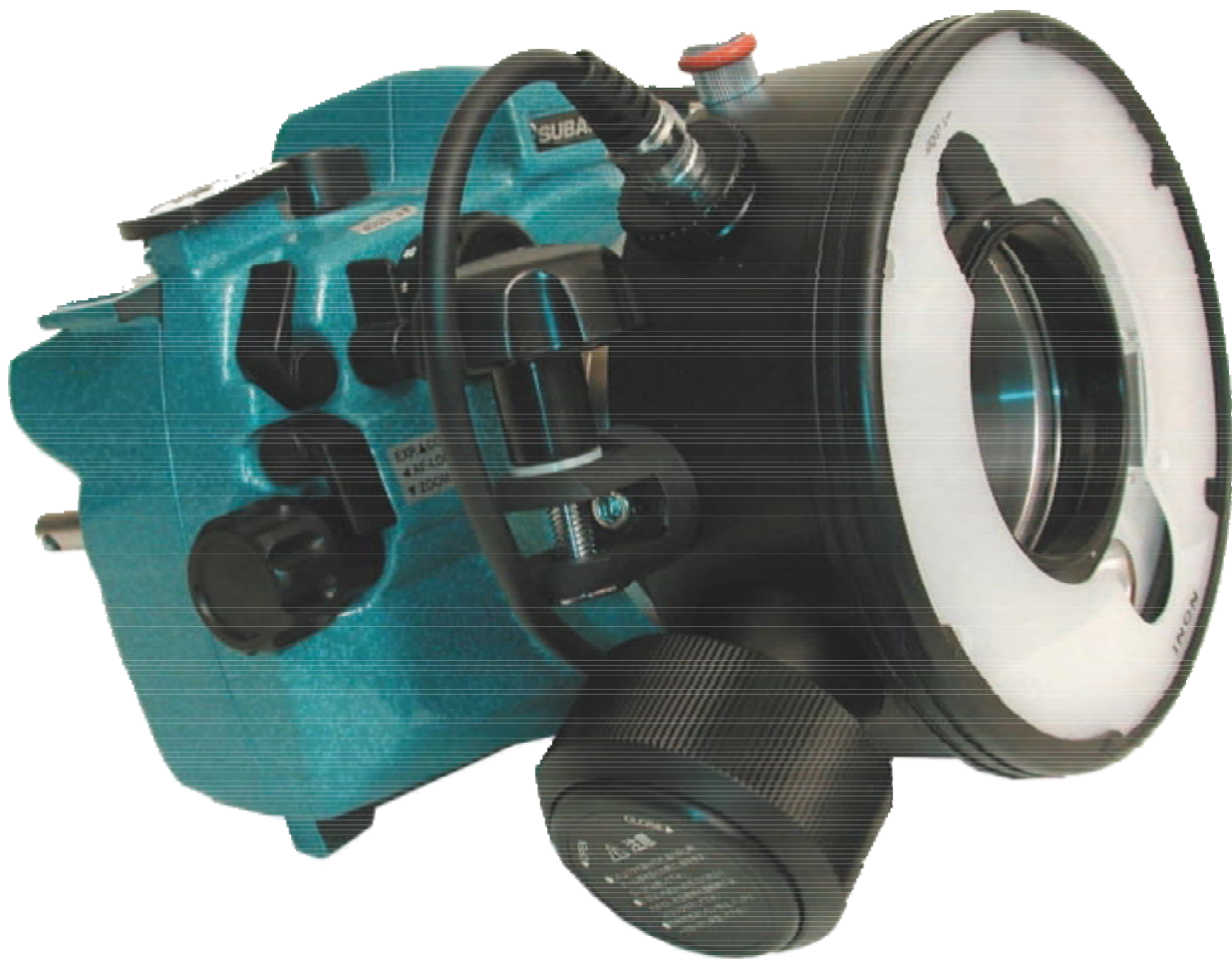


# Ring of Bright Water



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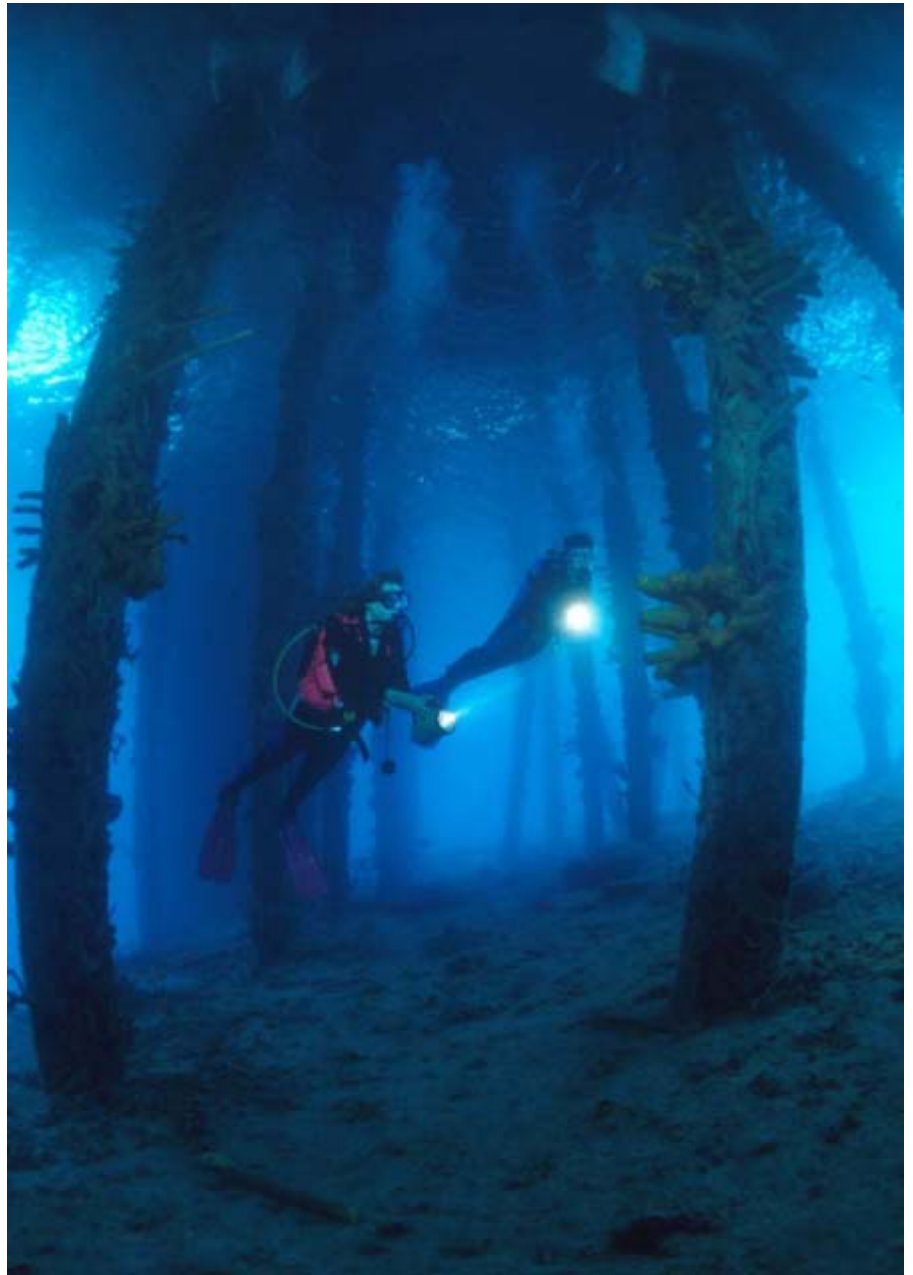
# Lights and divers

by Martin Edge

An incident at Heathrow Airport earlier this year was my inspiration for this article. I had a choice to make at the check in counter. My hand luggage was a tad too heavy and I was forced to leave something behind. What would it be? I had time on my side so I set about repacking my underwater photography carry-on bag.

Underwater tripod systems, back up flashguns just in case a spare of a spare of a spare failed to arrive in time, flash arms and other bits and bobs. Everything in the bag came under scrutiny of its worth on the trip. What could I afford to leave behind? What was essential? At the very top of the list of essential optional extras were my powerful Kowalski dive torches, two of them to be precise. I had never fully appreciated until then just how important to me divers with lights were.

The inclusion of a diver in any sense is not mandatory. Chris Newbert, author of 'Within a Rainbowed Sea' and 'In a Sea of Dreams' stated in a magazine interview that diver pictures were the most boring and redundant photographs on the face of the earth. In complete contrast American Skindiver magazine publishes numerous pictures of bikini-clad models, just posing for the underwater camera. The impression of an underwater beauty pageant or fashion parade cannot easily be avoided. These are two extremes of opinion, neither right nor wrong. My own opinions and views on this subject are just



*Both divers are using video lights as opposed to a dive torch. I have learnt that apertures of at least F5.6/F4 at 60th sec with ISO 100 film are necessary to bring out the full beam of even the brightest light. Using these apertures it is possible, as in this example, to illuminate a secondary point of interest. The sponges on the pillar are lit by the beam of the torch. Remember to direct the beam towards the subject. The photographer needs to see the beam being emitted. This takes fine-tuning of the beam direction and communication between photographer and model is crucial. Both divers were positioned with a variety of hand signals.*

*Notice how the first diver looks posed and contrived whilst in the background the more experienced model looks natural in her exploration of Town Pier in Bonaire. I took an entire roll of film on this idea and only achieved about 8 shots, which I considered were acceptable to me. Nikon 16mm lens, F4 @ 30th second, Elite 200*



*The model in this image is about 20 feet away. I used the technique has above, by drumming my fingers on the dome in order to get the torch dead centre. I would have preferred the beam to be slightly offset as in 'PNG Barrel Sponge' but I pressed the shutter when the Kowalski was aiming directly into the lens. In several other shots of this set the light beam was better but the position of the diver was awkward and unbalanced. Using apertures of F4 or F5.6 (as was the case in this shot) can often make the dive light too bright. Nikon 17mm - 35mm zoom lens set to 17mm end. Two Sea & Sea YS 120 flashguns set to manual half power with Elite 100 ISO.*



*This image represents what I am trying to achieve in my underwater photography. It matters not who may like or dislike it. The inclusion of the diver in the background, the size and scale of his presence, his body position, in my opinion speaks a thousand words. The addition of the dive light increases the impact even more so. The model is Ronnie, a dive guide from Sipadan Dive Center. Whenever an opportunity arose he would place himself about 20 to 30 feet behind the subject. I learnt to control the natural light exposure of both the blue mid water background and the dive light. A Sea & Sea YS 120 flash on manual full power provided the fill to paint in the shadows on the turtle. Nikon 16mm fisheye lens F8 @ 125th sec. Elite 100.*

that, opinions! Readers must come to their own conclusions; however, my approach in various situations may be of interest to you.

In my own wide-angle underwater photography I like to include divers/models for a number of reasons.

- \* Provide the viewer with a 'sense of being there'. The addition of a diver can bring the awe and wonder of the underwater world into someone's front room. It's something divers and non-divers alike can relate to. Dive magazines, equipment manufacturers, scuba travel agents exploit this enormously.

- \* To provide a sense of scale in a wide-angle seascape or close focus wide angle shot. Nothing dramatises a wreck shot better than a diver with a light

- \* To fill 'dead space' in an area of the picture that perhaps has just too much blue water.

- \* To create a feeling of depth through the image. I small diver in the background conjures up a feeling of being distant and automatically provides depth perspective so essential for successful wide-angle work.

- \* To reinforce a subject by directing the eye of the viewer. This maintains the interest of the viewer and continually leads the eye back to the focal point.

## But Why The Light?

A dive light is an optional extra, an added bonus but no, it is not essential. Consider this! Whilst the diver provides the sense of scale, the depth and the feeling of 'being there'. A powerful dive light reinforces



*The diver is reinforcing the main theme of the image being the shape and colour of the huge PNG barrel sponge. Notice how your eye is drawn back and forth between the diver and sponge. No matter where you look around the frame it is these two elements of the image, which attract your attention. The use of the light in this is completely different than the Bonaire Pier shot. My flashgun has lit the sponge not the dive-light. By using hand signal I have directed the diver to point the light directly into my dome port. I do this by drumming the fingers of my free left hand on the glass. The diver will see the reflection of the light on the dome. As soon as this effect looks pleasing I show an enthusiastic OK sign. The model then knows to slightly incline the flash towards the main subject. This adjustment is so slight, just enough to offset the beam slightly. Unlike the Pier shot you have to take care not to overexpose the dive-light. I have learnt that F11 or F16 is usually the most favourable aperture. When shooting up towards the surface it is common to achieve F11 or F16 apertures from the exposure of the blue water, which makes this technique easier to master. 16mm fisheye lens, dual Sea & Sea YS 120 flashguns set to full power. F11 @ 60th second with Elite 100 ISO.*



*An early attempt at using a model with a video light. I took a series of shots of my wife Sylvia exploring a swim-thru on one of the wrecks at Gubal. I tilted the camera angle to provide a more dynamic diagonal to the composition. I placed the light on the 'thirds' intersection to aid composition. The bubbles were luck but once again I think a subtle enhancement. I took about 6 shots of this idea. Nikonos 111 & 15mm lens. 60th sec at F4. Oceanic 2003 on half power.*

these aspects considerably. As we are on the subject have a glance at the picture illustrations above, screw your eyes up and visualise the shot without the light! Better or worst?

## Size of the Diver

Another consideration is the size of the diver/model in the frame. This relates to how close they are to the photographer. How many of you think of this when you are shooting film? The closer they are the more their pose is critical to the success of the image, gangling arms and legs is a certain no no. At these close distances the eyes of the model come into the scenario.

I say model because at this distance you are arranging a model as opposed to just a diver. If the viewer can see the eyes, they should look happy, enquiring and interested. More of this perhaps in a later issue!

Let me discuss the practicalities of all this in the extended captions of examples.



*I have taken very few shots in recent years where the features of the models are visible. This portrait was a request by the couple to have their pictures taken underwater. I selected a photogenic archway in Macro City, Sipadan. The foreground model has been briefed to explore the roof of the cave with her eyes and to reinforce her gaze at all times with the dive light (an ancient subatec video light). Her partner was briefed to direct his light towards her beam. You can see him looking towards me for directions. Again I pressed the shutter a fraction of a second early and to me the result looks contrived. When the features of models are plainly visible it becomes much harder to achieve the desired within the image. Boredom, uncertainty, stress, whatever the eyes of the models portray is obvious to all! Debbie (in the foreground) was a super model, with excellent buoyancy control and poise. She was able create so much enthusiasm and interest by her eye movements alone.*

*Nikon F801s in Subal housing. A Sea & Sea YS50 on TTL filled in the features of the models. F11, 30th second.*

Remember! It is not mandatory to fill space with a diver if the shot stands up for itself. Always consider that the use of such could ruin a shot entirely. I always keep the opening words of Chris Newbert in the back of my mind when choosing to include a diver with or without a light. His wide angles are outstanding and there is not a bubble in sight. We can all learn from his approach by studying his two coffee table books. 'Within a Rainbow Sea' and 'In a Sea of Dreams'.

And finally a note about the equipment. Whilst there are numerous dive/video lights/torches on the market, I use Kowalski torches, both the 620 and 1250 model. My reasons are due to the brightness of the beam, the two power settings 50% and 100%, duration of burn time and most importantly the charging implications. Kowalski lights can now be re-charged without hesitation even if they are not entirely discharged. At last the notorious 'memory effect' of the battery pack has no impact. The full charge time is about two hours and is achieved without opening any part of the casing thereby eliminating the risk of a flood.

**Martin Edge**

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