

SIXTY DAYS DOWN

✦ WHAT BETTER WAY TO WORK OFF ALL THAT EASTER CHOCOLATE THAN A COUPLE OF DIVES ON TASMANIA'S NEWEST DIVE SITE, THE PURPOSE-SUNK WRECK TROY D. AS A PASSIVE OBSERVER OF THE ENTIRE ARTIFICIAL REEF PROCESS, IT WAS TIME TO SEE FOR MYSELF WHAT THE FUSS WAS ABOUT. EARLY EASTER MONDAY I SNEAKED OUT OF THE HOUSE AND HEADED FOR TRIABUNNA. IN LESS THAN A WEEK I'D BE BACK AT WORK – I WANTED 'BEFORE' PHOTOS OF THE TROY D FOR A BASELINE TO SEE HOW SEA LIFE GROWS ON THE WRECK. IT WAS ALMOST 60 DAYS SINCE THE SCUTTLING AND IF I DIDN'T GET THERE SOON, I'D BE TOO LATE.

: JOHN SILBERBERG

Left - Sea life is taking over. Olympus C770uz, PT-022. Manual, 1/125@f6.3, ISO64. Inon D2000, sTTL.
Below - A threefin rests at the top of a staircase. Olympus C770uz, PT-022. Manual, 1/60@f3.5, ISO64. Inon D2000, sTTL.
Right - Eleven-armed sea star. Olympus C770uz, PT-022. Manual, 1/80@f7.1, ISO64. Inon D2000, sTTL.

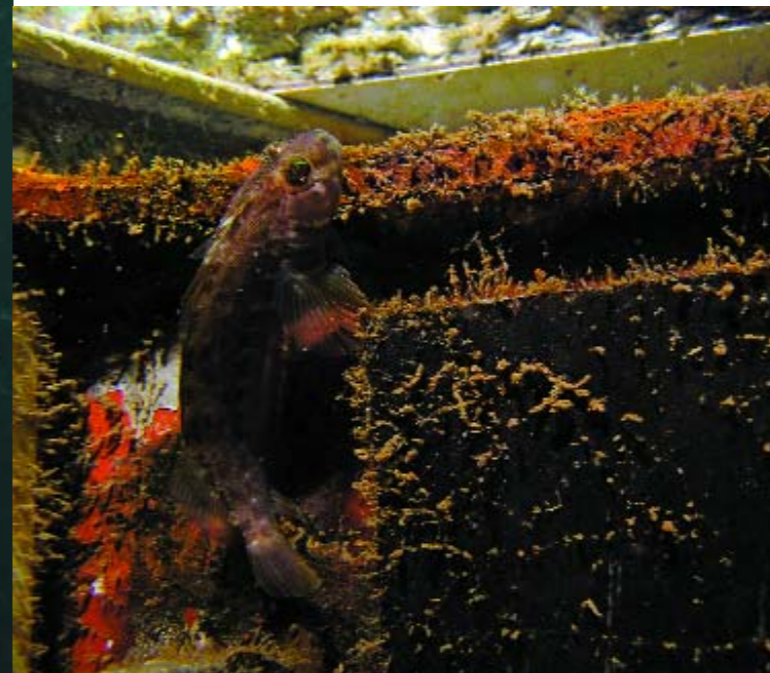
My gear was loaded onto *Liquid Fever* and we headed for Maria Island across Mercury Passage. Approaching the dive site, I spotted the mooring buoys above the wreck to reduce the risk of anchor damage by dive boats. There were a couple of divers in the water from the Tasmanian Aquaculture and Fisheries Institute (TAFI) videoing as part of a project to see how quickly fish move in; so I wasn't the only one interested in how the wreck performed as an artificial reef! They said the water was thick with particles and vis was down to around five metres. Just my luck – a plankton bloom!

On my first dive I stayed outside the hull. I dropped beneath the stern to where sessile growth had already covered the propeller – sponges and ascidians competed with molluscs for space, while a sea star took advantage of the smorgasbord on offer. A wire rope was caught on one blade, a situation intolerable when the ship was afloat. The rudder was gone but at the top of the rudderstock, a small opening had air trapped, even after almost two months underwater. I moved up the stern to the nameplate for a wide-angle photo. The plankton made it impossible, but I got a closer view of the first few raised letters. I swam slowly along the sponson, checking every opening. A beardie with a complex rewarded my patience. Like a blenny, she'd poke her head out of a scupper, eye me off, then retreat. After a few peeks she hid at the back of her hole.

Sea life is taking hold. Barnacle bases, like pockmarks, covered everything and algae sprouted from the wreck's lit surfaces. Small fish were doing well. Along the deck were numerous threefins, named for the three

distinct parts to their dorsal fin. Resting they propped themselves up on their ventral fins, surveying their domain. Farther forward, a piece of weed had the shakes, most unusual behaviour. It took me a while to work out what was going on – it was a perfectly camouflaged decorator crab. Several brightly coloured fish on a walkway at the sides of the cargo hatches caught my eye. Bright colours are unusual in temperate waters. Resembling a damselfish or basslet, the pink-orange fishes with mauve heads had me scratching mine. A very helpful Rudie Kuiter later identified them as juvenile barber perch. Thanks Rudie.

The value of the Troy D as an artificial reef was evident. Aside from the perch, juvenile mado and eleven-armed sea stars were in residence. Adult leatherjackets and beardies had also moved in. That the wreck was attracting so much fish life after such a short time promised great things for the future.





Left: A threefin resting on the sponson. Olympus C770uz, PT-022. Manual, 1/125@f7.1, ISO64. Inon D2000, sTTL.

Right: The main engine. Olympus C770uz, PT-022. Manual, 1/100@f5.0, ISO64. Inon D2000, sTTL.

Coat of arms painted on the bow. Olympus C770uz, PT-022. Manual, 1/100@f4.5, ISO64. Inon D2000, sTTL.

The flywheel sits aft of the main engine. Olympus C770uz, PT-022. Manual, 1/100@f5.0, ISO64. Inon D2000, sTTL.



I HOVERED OVER THE ENGINE AND TURNED A SLOW CIRCLE IN A SPACE MORE THAN TWO STOREYS HIGH AND IMAGINED FLYING THROUGH THE SPACE WHILE IT WORKED, THE HEAT AND NOISE VERY DIFFERENT FROM THE COOL QUIET WATER I ENJOYED.

The colours on the wreck surprised me; expecting a drab palette, the gaudy green and yellow paint of her past provided an unexpected backdrop; bright orange oxides of iron bloomed on any bare steel, and the showy hues of the juvenile fish stood out against this. As sponges and anemones develop, the colours of the wreck are set to feature on their own.

At the forecandle, I turned and drifted back with the current over the open holds to the bridge. Once the navigation hub, the wheelhouse is now stripped bare. Though a small space, removal of the doors prior to scuttling makes for easy entry and exit. Along the front of the bridge are the now glassless window frames. Behind the bridge the funnel is the highest part of the wreck at 12 metres, a little deep for safety stops but a fixed line will provide a reference and simplify ascents.

For lunch we anchored just off the beach at Maria Island's historic settlement of Darlington where silos from the old cement works stand alongside the convict ruins as reminders of the Island's diverse

past – an impressive setting to off-gas and refuel.

Time to get back in the water. On this dive I planned to penetrate the wreck. One of the big differences between a 'wild' wreck and a purpose-sunk one is the control of hazards before scuttling. Part of this process is the removal of cabling and wires to prevent entanglement, and thorough cleaning of the ship's tanks to protect divers and the environment from harmful residues. Holes cut through the hull open up internal compartments and allow divers to easily find a way out. A recently noted criticism by purists of some prior purpose-sunk wrecks is that there are too many holes – opening up the hull intrudes on their wreck diving experience. But it needs to be remembered that for dive operators bringing divers to these sites safety is paramount. To be successful, a balance is necessary. Those who planned the holes in the Troy D seem to have got it right; there are enough to allow easy exit, but not so many that they are intrusive. The

experience of wreck diving is preserved without unnecessary danger to visitors.

Moored over the wreck again, we dropped in and entered the hull through a hole cut low on the starboard side which brought me in to the engine room level with the main engine entablature (engine block). The removal of the cylinder heads lets divers look inside the engine to see the piston tops. Head-bolts that once constrained the high combustion pressures now protruded. I hovered over the engine and turned a slow circle in a space more than two storeys high and imagined flying through the space while it worked, the heat and noise very different from the cool quiet water I enjoyed.

The upper level of the engine room opens into crew's accommodation. Because my twinset was too wide I had to roll slightly to one side to swim through a narrow doorway into what was once a bathroom. Two toilet bowls remained and without doubt will feature in many shots! The tiled deck was still in place and the stainless steel strip on the doorsill flashed

in the light of my torch. On the port side are two table pedestals in what was probably a mess room where crew ate meals and relaxed in off-watch periods.

At the forward end of the deck is a staircase to the next level. The stair treads are gone now and as I ascended a threefin skipped up the ramp ahead of me, before coming to rest at the upper edge. From this space is a hole up to the bridge and an exit through the front windows. A school of juvenile mado preferred the windows, flitting in and out but never straying too far from shelter.

The cargo holds beckoned and I swam past the mado and dropped down through the open hatch. Swimming through the holds was like travelling through a skeleton – the deck beams crossed overhead and the ship's frames supported the sides like a giant rib cage. Right the way forward inside the bow, the forepeak tank is largely enclosed. Gloomy despite light from the deck hatches and holes in the bulkhead, it's one of the darker places on the wreck. In the

corners, beardies swam over each other, sinuous bodies writhing as they tried to hide from my torchlight.

I swam out through a hole in the port bow and inspected the hawse pipe. A length of chain dangled but the anchor is long gone. At the very front of the wreck is a painted coat of arms, the logo of the ship's previous owners, yet another reminder of the Troy D's previous life.

I floated up over the bulwarks to the foredeck and into a gentle current. Plankton moved past the bow and the wreck's growth reached out to feed. Barnacles swept their combs and feasted on the nutrient soup, their rhythmic beating fascinating and almost hypnotic. As the end of my dive approached, I hovered at the bow and looked back at the ship; the deck equipment was slowly disappearing under a blanket of sea life and a leatherjacket was feeding on the newly-grown algae.

Once more I moved with the current over the holds, enjoying the weightlessness of

flying over open spaces. At the start of the day the plankton bloom had been disappointing. Now, as the deck beams drifted by, the spaces materialised from the planktonic veil and it seemed somehow appropriate. The eerie green

MARIA ISLAND is a national park renowned for its natural appeal; every year thousands take the ferry across the Passage to visit. Until recently, the waters around it were anonymous. Now, with continuing discovery of new dive sites, underwater may prove to be as spectacular as above water. In 1991, the declaration of the Maria Island Marine Reserve established the importance of the region to marine conservation. It also acknowledged the high marine biodiversity. This 1500-hectare reserve isn't far from the *Troy D*, but the wreck site is relatively barren and flat. The spill-over effect marine reserves have on surrounding fish populations means the *Troy D* will fill with fish. The wreck is also a 'no-take' zone so marine life will thrive in safety.



Left: Chains on the foredeck. Olympus C770uz, PT-022. Manual, 1/125 @ f6.3, ISO64. Inon D2000, sTTL.



THE TROY D IS SERVICED BY:

- Island Ocean Charters at the Eastcoaster Resort, between Triabunna and Orford. Contact Michael Davis 03 6234 5658 or 0408 313 904 www.islandoceancharters.com.au
 - Go-Dive: info@godivetassie.com, 03 6231 9749. www.godivetassie.com
- AIR TRAVEL - Qantas, Virgin Blue and Jetstar all fly into Tasmania. Beware of baggage weight limits and excess baggage charges.
 CAR HIRE - Available in Launceston and Hobart from city centres and airports.
 ACCOMMODATION - Eastcoaster Resort, 03 6357 1172. Swansea Backpackers, 03 6257 8650
 For more information - www.troyd.com.au

THE SCUTTLING OF THE TROY D is the culmination of the East Coast Artificial Reef project. The drive for the project came from the Orford/Triabunna Chamber of Commerce. A Tasmanian community group, the CoC is hoping for a regional increase in employment and revenue as divers visit the wreck. In addition to community fundraising, the project received support of almost \$300,000 from each of the Federal and State Governments. Tasmania's Department of Economic Development retains overall control of the site and, under the Department's supervision, two charter operators hold licenses to take divers to the wreck. Private boats may also visit, but require a permit to do so.

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light suited the mood of wreck diving – that otherworldly sensation felt when seeing a ship on the seabed, those straight lines and hard angles out of place among the softness of the sea life. Wreck diving is about adventure. It's about seeing an object made by human hands resting in an environment where it was never to be. It's about history and excitement. Wrecks tell a story. The Troy D's story is about success. The success of a community group concerned about their economic future. The success of an artificial reef as sea life colonises the wreck. And the success of a purpose-sunk wreck as a dive site.

The Troy D is well worth diving. As an artificial reef, she's become a focal point, drawing in species from the surrounding area. As a dive wreck, she's a fun dive in a safe environment. Exploring the wreck is an adventure where personal imagination determines the excitement levels.

I admit that before diving her, I was sceptical. I was convinced the Troy D would be sterile, lacking in attraction. But I was wrong and have since become a convert – I've now seen for myself what all the fuss was about and I'll be back.



THE TROY D

Formerly a motorised Barge the Roy A. Cameron; converted to a coastal trader. Built in 1969 at the State Dockyard, Newcastle, NSW to International Class.

Initially used as a hopper barge for service in Port Phillip Bay by the Port of Melbourne Authority for channel and berth maintenance.

Then purchased from the Port of Melbourne Authority by Devine Shipping in mid 1995 and refurbished at Geelong as a bulk carrier for trade on the NSW coast between Port Jackson (Sydney Harbour) and Bass Point (south of Wollongong). Grounded at Bass Point at



about 19:00 hrs, 1st November 1995. Refloated the next day by the owners and laid up at Port Jackson, Sydney Harbour, until 2006.

CURRENT

The Troy D was cleaned and prepared as a dive wreck by Devine Marine in Sydney New South Wales prior to the ship being towed to Triabunna.

An independent report on the ship's hull and interior was commissioned by the Orford Triabunna Chamber of Commerce to ensure that no marine pests were present on the hull prior to towing.

The boat was cleaned and prepared to guidelines used by the Commonwealth Department of Environment & Heritage (DEH). The formal inspection of the ship carried out by the DEH took place on 18 January 2007.

TROY D Specifications

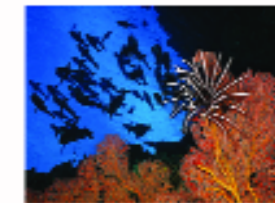
Length: 55.34 metres (181'-6")

Depth: 10.97 metres; Height 14.33 metres

Weight: 590 tonnes approximately (~ 580 tons)

Visit www.troyd.com.au to view the Troy D wreck dive's access openings and to view the Troy D Wreck dive site mooring setout.

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