

: JENNY AND TONY ENDERBY



regularly ride boat bows but often shy away from divers. The largest residents are Bryde's whales up to 14 metres long. They feed amongst diving Australasian gannets in the surface fish schools. Orca often pass through the area where they feed on stingrays.

Dive sites suit experienced or new divers. In a few protected areas you can dive just for enjoyment or to take photographs. Around the rest of the Gulf's dive sites you can also collect scallops (in season), mussels or rock lobsters, locally known as crayfish. Here we highlight 10 of the islands.

The Gulf has over 100 islands; the underwater terrain here includes rocky reefs and pinnacles, kelp forests, sandy plains, shipwrecks, sponge gardens, caves and archways. In late summer visibility can exceed 30 metres and water temperatures are around 22 degrees Celsius. The outer Gulf islands – Great and Little Barrier, Mokohinau and the Hen and Chickens – have schools of fish that could be compared to the Poor Knights Islands just to the north. Blue maomao, kahawai, trevally and baitfish swarm close in with pink maomao, demoiselles and butterfly perch further down. The invertebrate-covered walls beneath the kelp forest and deeper sponge gardens have a wealth of subjects for photographers.

Whale and dolphin encounters are possible on any trip across the Hauraki Gulf. Playful large grey bottlenose dolphins will interact with snorkellers in the water; smaller grey and cream common dolphins

Hen and Chicken Islands Numerous small islands make up the Chicken (Marotere) group while to the south is the larger Hen (Taranga) Island. Landing on any of these island wildlife sanctuaries is not permitted. They're surrounded by kelp-covered reefs, with some large boulders where rock lobsters hide. There's nice invertebrate growth below the kelp forest. Red moki, wrasses and leatherjackets swim amongst the kelp, while sweep and blue maomao school above it. Sponge life is more prolific below 15 metres and the fish schools change to pink maomao and butterfly perch. A few snapper loiter near the sandy bottom and the occasional spotted black groper can be seen.

Mokohinau Islands There are numerous islands and rocks in this group with some wildlife sanctuaries. Burgess has a lighthouse and is the only island allowing shore access. Groper, Navire and Simpson's Rock are some of the best dive

THE GREAT GULF EXPERIENCE

> KNOWN AS THE 'CITY OF SAILS', AUCKLAND IS THE NORTHERN GATEWAY TO NEW ZEALAND. THE HAURAKI GULF ON AUCKLAND'S DOORSTEP IS PROBABLY BEST KNOWN FOR AMERICA'S CUP YACHT RACING. VISITING DIVERS PASS THROUGH AUCKLAND ON THEIR WAY TO BETTER KNOWN PLACES LIKE THE POOR KNIGHTS ISLANDS, RAINBOW WARRIOR, WHITE ISLAND AND FIORDLAND – BUT HAURAKI GULF HAS PLENTY OF GOOD DIVE SITES TO EXPLORE.





Previous pages:

Main - Close up view showing the little eyes of the scallop.

Top - Pods of common dolphins are usually encountered offshore.

Bottom - Yellow moray eels are usually found hiding in crevices; Red rock lobster or red crayfish are common on reefs where they hide in cracks; Diver amongst ecklonia kelp, investigating yellow sponges and goatfish.

These pages:

Top - Colourful goatfish rest on sponge-covered rocks; A pair of mottled triplefins

Below - These little triplefins are endemic to New Zealand but easy to find; A pair of eagle rays making close contact; These beautiful dahlia anemones are usually around 10cm across; Snapper are one of the most common fish in the marine reserve Goat Island.



sites as they drop quickly into deep water. Kingfish, trevally and kahawai school around the reefs; scorpionfish sit camouflaged on the rock walls and red moki feed on the invertebrate growth. White hydroids often have pink and white Jason nudibranchs and their pink egg rosettes. When there's little swell, the Canyon on the northwest side of Burgess is one of the most spectacular dives. There's plenty to photograph along the colourful walls but take a torch with you.

Sail Rock Southwest of Hen Island, this rock rises 138 metres above the surface and drops to 40 metres below. Trevally, sweep, demoiselles, silver drummer and blue maomao school around the rock. Fields of common anemones cover the

shallow walls and triplefins abound amongst them, sponges and sea urchins are common. Amongst the cracks, fissures and boulders are red rock lobsters and moray eels. Deeper are snapper, tarakihi, leatherjackets, porae and John dory. Grey finger sponges mix with golfball and encrusting sponges.

Great Barrier (Aotea) Island Accessible by ferry or plane, this large inhabited island has a huge number of possible dive sites. Shipwrecks include the *Wairarapa* off Miners Head, the *Wiltshire* at Cape Barrier and the *Taniwha* off Tryphena. The Needles to the northeast are rocky canyons with colourful invertebrate-covered walls; big red rock lobsters hide in the cracks and the yellow moray eels

are huge. Rakitu Island has a large spectacular archway with steep walls outside dropping to sponge gardens at 25 metres. Inside the arch the fish life is prolific with demoiselles and the occasional large blue moki. Around the Barrier's kelp-covered reefs are snapper, red moki, blue maomao, kahawai and trevally. During summer, schools of kingfish move through here hunting the smaller baitfish.

Little Barrier (Hauturu) Island Just 22 kilometres from Leigh, no landing is allowed without a permit at this wildlife sanctuary. To the northeast Ngatamahine Point has a series of pinnacles dropping steeply to sand at 25 metres. Channels between them have grey and orange

finger sponges with butterfly perch, pink maomao, snapper and blue maomao. Te Hue Point has several huge rocks that drop to 25 metres. The walls on the shaded sides are covered with anemones, tiger shells and sponges below the kelp forest. Rocky reefs surrounding the island have plenty of hiding places for red rock lobsters and out on the sand you may find scallops. Red moki drift around the reefs with occasional painted moki. Stingrays are often seen over sandy areas.

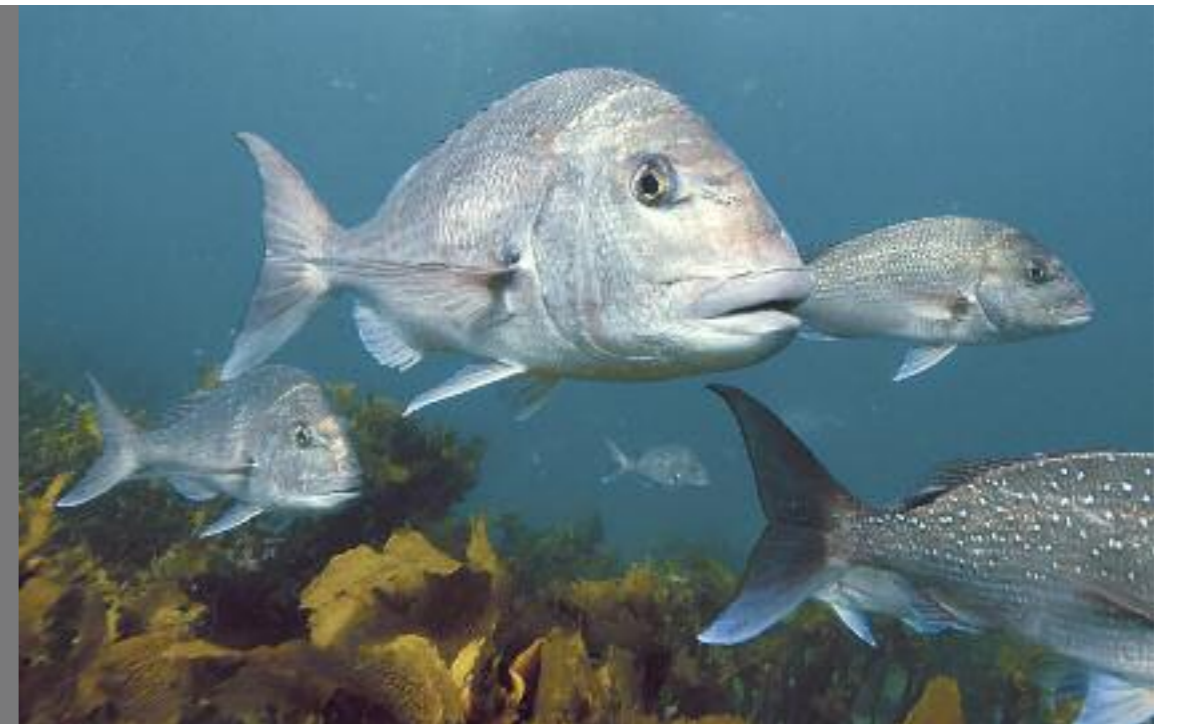
Goat (Hawere) Island Part of the Cape Rodney to Okakari Point Marine Reserve, Goat Island can be accessed easily from shore. It's an ideal spot for photographers to get close to the fish life. The snapper are huge and approach divers and

snorkellers. Alphabet Bay and the channel can be accessed from shore. North Reef is a series of rocky reefs almost reaching the surface. Schools of very big silver drummer feed on the seaweeds, big snapper lurk and occasional big blue moki are seen. Schools of smaller fish like demoiselles and blue maomao add to the prolific fish life. In season *Tritonia* nudibranchs feed on dead man's fingers. Near the reef tops common anemones cover the rocks and leatherjackets hang around picking at the invertebrate life.

Kawau Island Four species of wallabies were introduced to this island by Governor George Grey around 1870. The island sits in Kawau Bay, best known by divers for the scallops found there. Off

the coppermine chimney on the southeast side, scallops are in 10-15 metres. Flat Rock has two prominent cones and is best dived at slack water. Snapper feed in the sand gullies and John dory move around the kelp. Big red rock lobsters hide under the rocks and stingrays and eagle rays are common. In summer kingfish and kahawai move in. At Fairchild Reef – a large patch of rough ground covered with kelp on the northeast side – the depth drops to 20 metres. Around the kelp holdfasts are interesting invertebrates including tiger and trumpet shells.

Tiritiri Matangi Island Better known for its birds than its fish life, Tiri is an open sanctuary where visitors can land and see some of New Zealand's endangered



THE UNDERWATER TERRAIN HERE INCLUDES ROCKY REEFS AND PINNACLES, KELP FORESTS, SANDY PLAINS, SHIPWRECKS, SPONGE GARDENS, CAVES AND ARCHWAYS... BLUE MAOMAO, KAHAWAI, TREVALLY AND BAITFISH SWARM CLOSE IN WITH PINK MAOMAO, DEMOISELLES AND BUTTERFLY PERCH FURTHER DOWN



Left - A school of trainee scuba divers emerge from their dive at Goat Island.
Right - John dory cruising above the kelp hunting for smaller fish.



>LINK wikipedia.org/wiki/Hauraki_Gulf

wildlife. To the east is Shearer Rock with a depth to 25 metres, best dived on slack water. There are interesting cracks and holes in the rocks and a few red rock lobsters. Large fish schools swarm around the edge of the rock and you may see remnants of the *Royal Tar*, which came to grief here in the early 1900s. At the outer edge of Hobbs Bay the sandy bottom has a few scallops and some large stingrays.

Waiheke Island Regular ferries take visitors and residents to Waiheke Island from downtown Auckland. To the northeast Hook Bay, with a depth of up to

20 metres, is a mix of reefs and sandy channels with good fish numbers. Snapper and small school fish live around the rocks and there are plenty of colourful invertebrates on the walls. North of Thumb Point is Gannet Rock which has strong currents but good life down the walls and plenty of schooling fish. Diving in the Waiheke Channel between Waiheke and Pakatoa Islands at around 15-20 metres is fairly grubby water but a good place to collect scallops.

Channel Island Although this island at the tip of the Coromandel Peninsula is very exposed to wind and swells, it can be an awesome dive. There are usually red and packhorse rock lobsters in the cracks, surrounded by colourful invertebrate life. Big schools of fish feed in the current and in summer there are often schools of large kingfish close to the steep walls. If the weather allows you to dive it, almost anything could swim past!

