



By Keith Cardwell
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l-r: Navy (D Moran). PADI Instructors Chris DeSanto and Paul Webb (K Cardwell). Tony Black teaching fellow IDC candidates L Summersgill, D Willis and M Barry (K Cardwell). Tugan Desalination Plant (S Grey). J Vermey topside, S Vermey (D Moran) to a sinkhole dive site in the Northern Territories (S Vermey). Navy (D Moran) Joel Vermey kitted up with side-mount gear for a deep lake dive (K Cardwell)

Want to earn a living from DIVING?

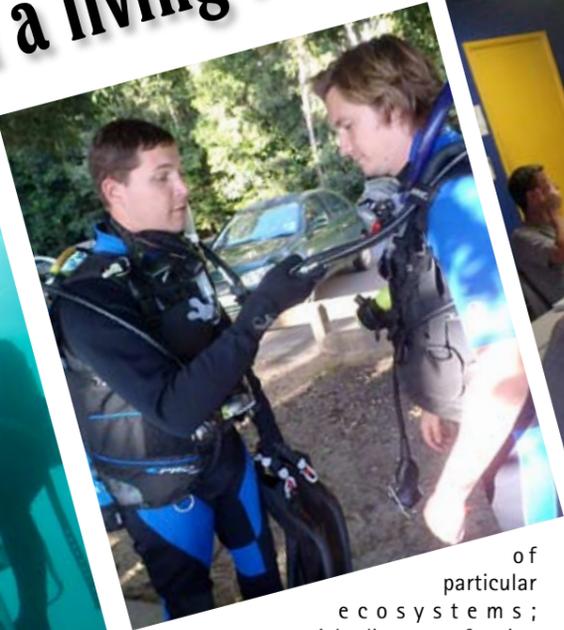


Image by Dave Moran

When I left school in the 1960s, career options for anyone who wanted to be an engineer were interesting but relegated literally to the 'nuts and bolts' of what engineers were expected to be good at: how to fix stuff that went bump in the night, how to light up streets, build bridges and keep factories pumping out biscuits or washing machines. As the years passed I've met more and more folk who have the word 'engineer' as part of their job description but possessing a myriad of different capabilities that have become increasingly more specialized and certainly indicating a greater variety of technically related occupations from which to choose.

Diving has become a bit like that - but hardly surprising. Diving as an occupation is a pursuit that has also become specialized. Now encroaching on many of the things we do, it is of considerably more importance to society than some would suspect. We have divers in the Navy, Police and Customs performing public service; underwater researchers concerned with activities from archaeological exploration to the zoology

of particular ecosystems; commercial divers performing engineering work; and dive operations catering for recreational divers. Even recreational divers have an amazing variety of activities in which they can apply themselves ranging from freshwater diving at altitude in cool water (or under ice!) to fast flowing drift dives in tropical environments with either catch bag or camera in hand. It isn't much of a wonder why so many look at diving as a career.

Early on when underwater activities weren't as well developed, divers like our earlier engineers had their own basic 'nuts and bolts' divisions to choose from: those considered to be recreational where divers dived for fun, caught crayfish for tea but nevertheless paid for their diving, then there were commercial divers who were considered to be highly paid and mainly insane (by virtue of choosing this occupation in the first place). Being one of the first full-time recreational diving instructors doing just that for a job in New Zealand, I think from the number of times I was asked '... and Keith, what do you do for a real job?', the suspicion of insanity could equally have applied to me.

But some things have changed. Improvements in technology and communication were on a roll and more

and more folk from a wider demographic were becoming involved in underwater activities: enjoying, contributing and being paid for it. Commercial divers were now not the only folk that could get paid to dive and you didn't have to be mentally suspect. Now the training of recreational divers - with all its supporting cast of manufacturers,



wholesalers, retailers and repair technicians to name a few - was also on a roll. Diver training has now developed well beyond the traditional range of courses from beginner through to instructor and its fairly well known list of continuing education courses. Now there is also an extensive range of technical diving courses complete with highly sophisticated equipment that promote extreme adventures such as diving deeper than the traditional recreational diving depth limits and swimming into big (and sometimes tight) holes.

For the enthusiast who wishes to follow a career path involving underwater, diving has unlimited potential but there are a lot of pros and cons to weigh up in choosing whether to get involved with either recreational and/or commercial activities.

Recreational diving is now alive and well and a long way from the days when enthusiasts had to use homemade equipment made from old car tyre inner tubes, cut glass, glue and hope. We have gear that all but makes coffee for you and I'm sure I recognize some items used today from its first appearance in *Star Wars*.



far left and left: Leo Ducker with his home made mask (made from a floor polish tin), oxygen rebreather and crayfish grab. Leo with home made fins from gumboot legs with rubber hose and Dukka Diva mask. Leo's brother Clarry invented the masks and hand flippers. Leo (1945) with Mark IV gas mask and pump. To enable him to breathe underwater the hose and canister were removed, the valve rotated and a plug put in the upturned breathing hole. The mask was attached to the pump with a long hose and air was hand pumped. (See article issue October/November 2000 (#60)).

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Diver training has also become considerably more sophisticated and training divers is now an occupation where improvements and opportunities have certainly made a job in the recreational diving industry appear very attractive.

It is far too often the case for many working as a recreational diving instructor, or in fact in many of the jobs associated with a regular dive shop, to realise a decent income. More often than not this is compensated for by the style of life offered by the situation of the dive operation. After all, if accommodation and food is paid for and you're living in a tropical paradise next to the beach, it's hard to justify the salary earned as an accountant or engineer in an urban environment. In urban environments the concerns of making ends meet are often different and lifestyle will only go so far in justifying the relatively low incomes realised from working in many recreational dive operations. However, some operations do pay well and a good balance between lifestyle and income can be managed. But situations change and some of those employed in this industry feel the need to forgo the lifestyle they enjoy with their present occupation for one that will generate a greater income. In doing so many will choose a related occupation such as becoming a boat captain or in another capacity that involves getting wet but paying far better wages: this often requires a transition to some form of commercial diving activity.

Commercial diving

Not a subject that I have much first hand knowledge of other than one memorable weekend to inspect cables and mooring blocks. The weather was awful, the dives cancelled and I spent a long trip

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above images courtesy New Zealand School of Commercial Diving

home being regaled by my 'supervisor' who managed to talk me out of this as a career option. That wasn't the intention but the war stories meant to fire me up with enthusiasm frightened the pants off me. But that was then.

Safety measures now in place with commercial diving operations are paramount with their divers enjoying working environments that, although often obviously not without risk, are safer than ever before experienced. Although the cost is higher to become a commercial diver compared with that of becoming a recreational diving professional, for those eligible, assistance is given by way of loans and allowances available through those courses that are approved by the New Zealand Qualification Authority (NZQA) and the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC).

Even though my knowledge of the commercial industry is more of a spectator, I can see clearly that it does demand a special kind of person. Two of my closest mates fit that mould: they both became recreational diving instructors but opted to go commercial. The one I dive with regularly says that apart from his stint in the army, commercial diving is the best job he's ever had but he insists that the only similarity between recreational and commercial diving is that both happen underwater. With the visibility usually lousy to zero as well as equally often cold and dark, the camaraderie of the teams he's worked with along with the varied dive sites and places they visit far outweigh the difficulties of the job. He's also earning more than twice what he would otherwise. But it's not always cold and dark and working surrounded by cages to keep the crocodiles out – there are so many other occupations out there where commercial diver qualifications are necessary.

Long gone are the days of limited choice. It doesn't matter what endeavour we set our hearts on, recreational or commercial, there are so many areas in which we can become specialists and so many opportunities to assist in getting there. All we have to do is think hard about what suits us best and to start the ball rolling.

If you think wet is wonderful – there's no time like the present to get in and make a splash! 🐬



image by Dave Moran