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ENTRY 11

The Wreck Trail – Rockingham Foreshore

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The Rockingham Wreck Trail – also known as the Bell Park Dive Trail – is one of those dive sites where everyone in Western Australia has either heard of it or dived it at least once in their scuba diving career. In fact many divers would have dived here as a part of their open water or advance courses as it is a very popular place with most of the local dive shops south of the Swan River in Perth.

Like most of the local dive sites located in Cockburn Sound the Wreck Trail suffers at times from bad visibility, but it more than makes up for this in the amount of life that can be found on the few wrecks located there. This is muck diving at its best.

Rockingham is located approximately 35 km south of the Perth CBD at the end of the Kwinana Freeway. The Wreck Trail is located on the Rockingham Foreshore directly in front of the carpark at the intersection of Rockingham Beach Rd and Flinders Lane. You can't miss it as there is a statue of some dolphins at the car park entrance and at the rear is a fountain with a large rolling granite ball.

This carpark is the best place to park in and gear up; however, it is small so you are best getting there early in the morning if you want to park here, otherwise there is a larger carpark about 300m to the north and ample roadside parking which is adjacent to the park.

The area is nice and grassy to gear up on and plenty of shady trees and shelters that can be used on those very sunny days. There are two toilet blocks located at either end of the park which are only a short walk or a quick run if you are desperate. On the other side of the road there are a number of shops and eateries to keep the non divers entertained. The park has some quality play grounds to keep the kids occupied whilst mum or dad are diving as well as a safe swimming beach.

If it is your first time to this site it will pay to orientate yourself to the site so that you know where you are and where the site is located. To do this, before gearing up, walk up to the pathway at the top of the carpark or up to the granite ball fountain and look out towards the water.

In the distance you will see Garden Island and the causeway running from the right to the left that takes traffic over to the island. To the right you will see the northern end of the island which opens out into open water and on a clear day you can see Fremantle from here. Around to the right you will see the Kwinana Industrial Area.



The dive site is located about 200m from the front of the beach. Looking directly out to your front you will see two large yellow marker buoys about 400m from the beach. These mark the edge of the no go zone for boats. Coming in from those yellow buoys about 200m from the beach and slightly to the right of the car park you will see a buoy with a metal diver's flag on it. This marks the site.

In all but strong winds the water here is normally calm and it is an easy surface swim to the dive buoy. The bottom gradually slopes down until you reach a bank where it drops suddenly to depth. On a high tide the deepest point on the wrecks is about 16 - 17m.

Once you have geared up, walk down to the waters edge and line up the dive buoy and walk out into the water. Once in the water keep walking until you reach a suitable depth to finish gearing up.

A little hint here, there is a small channel that suddenly drops off and then rises again and levels out for some distance. On a low tide those who are of normal to tall in height should be able to walk across this channel quite comfortably; however, those who are vertically challenged may have some difficulty so it would be advisable that they finish gearing up before they cross the channel. On a high tide it is advisable that everyone finishes gearing up before they try and cross it.

For first timers to this site it is advisable that you then do the short, about 150m, surface swim out to the dive buoy. Once you are at the buoy do your final checks before descending. The largest of the wrecks – the 'Target' is located slightly to the southwest (behind you to the left if you are facing the Island) and about 15m away. Make this

your starting point once you have descended.

Start your descent following the dive buoy's chain down to the sea bed and at this point you should be in between 15 – 16 m of depth depending on the tide. Once on the bottom do your final adjustments and when complete look around for some ropes as the Wreck Trail is fairly well marked out with these ropes.

You are looking for a rope that goes off to the southwest slightly back in the direction in which you just came from. Follow this rope and it should take you to the bow of the 'Target', you will know if you have gone too far if the bank suddenly begins to raise in front of you.

Beware though that the visibility is not very good, on average only about 6 – 8 m maximum, so the best thing to do on your first couple of dives is to follow the rope trail and you should be okay.

If you can not see the rope that goes to the 'Target' follow the other rope which heads of in a north easterly direction, this will take you to the first of the plane wrecks and do the site in reverse.



If you have found the 'Target' it is a large cabin cruiser laying on its starboard side. Following a large storm in June 2008 which dramatically altered the sea floor round the site, including burying a couple of the older wrecks, a large amount of sand has been pushed up onto the port side of the 'Target', whilst exposing the starboard side of the wreck and making the lean more pronounced.

This wreck is a live with many varieties of fish and invertebrates that will keep you busy for ages. You can swim into the cabin of the wreck; however, be careful as there is not a lot of room to move so it is advisable to back out the way you went in.

Located on this wreck is a family of Western Talma Butterfly fish who happily go about their business as you watch them. There is also a large number of Wrasse who frequent this wreck and will eagerly follow you around waiting for the chance of a feed. They will also pose long enough for you to focus on before they scoot off leaving only a tail fin in the frame.

Take your time on this wreck and really look over it and there is a chance you will find a number of species of

nudibranchs, including Chromodoris Reticulata and Mexichromis Macropus which make for good photo opportunities.

After you have spent time on the 'Target' you can either follow the ropes from the bow of the wreck which will take you back to the dive buoy and then onto the first of the two plane wrecks or if you take the rope from the stern it will take you directly to the first plane wreck.

A word of advice, as you follow the ropes from wreck to wreck take your time and look for sea horses as they seem to have a liking for the ropes and regularly make their homes on them. Also beware that the ropes have a lot of growth on them and using the ropes to pull yourself around will cause a lot of unnecessary damage and spoil the site for the others who follow you.

On reaching the first aircraft wreck you will notice that it is covered in sand - as well as the other aircraft wreck. Another legacy from the June 2008 storm that ripped through the sound and altered the dive site considerably and will probably

remain that way until the next big storm comes through and changes the site again.

As with the other wrecks on this site once you arrive at the wreck, slow down and take your time looking over and it and you will be amazed with what you will find. A family of eel tail catfish have made the aircraft wrecks their home and regularly migrate between the two of them, so if they are not on this wreck they will be at the next one. There is also an opportunity to find seahorses at the rear of the wreck, for some reason they like to congregate here.

Once you have finished looking over this wreck its time to move onto the second aircraft wreck. This one is a bit bigger and has more of the wings exposed above the sand. Again simply follow the ropes from the first plane to the second one. This one is slightly bigger and there is a bit more exposed than the first one. Again this wreck is covered in marine growth and taking your time will reward you with finding some amazing little creatures.

After you have finished exploring the site swim slowly back to the diver buoy. If the sands have shifted considerably

you may be lucky and find the exposed remains of the other boat that has been sunk here. This one is more broken up and spread out along the sea bed floor. There also used to be an old porcelain toilet here that made for a good photo opportunity – if the visibility is right.

Once you reach the diver buoy swim towards the sand bank and slowly follow it up until you reach your safety stop at the 5m mark. After your safety stop follow the sand bank up until it levels out and then slowly swim towards the shore until you can not go any further. Then stand up remove your fins and walk to the shore.

Once you reach the shore take the steps to the left and climb back up onto the grassy area. At the top of these steps there are some showers located to the left on the grass. Use these to wash down your gear before heading back to your vehicle.

If you are planning on doing a second dive and need a tank fill there is a dive shop located directly across the road. The other dive shop located in Rockingham is on Dixon Rd, a short five minute drive away.

If you are feeling hungry or thirsty there are some great eateries located a short walking distance from the carpark.

Overall this is a very easy dive and the site does have something for everyone. As stated earlier it is popular with dive shops conducting courses throughout most of the year so it can get very busy with students as well as other divers visiting the site and for this reason as the day goes on the visibility can drop quiet significantly. My advice is to get there early and enjoy an early morning dive with a delicious breakfast and hot coffee afterwards from one of the eateries.

If you haven't dived the Wreck Trail before or it has been awhile come on down, you will enjoy it.

