

Journey to a perfect place

by Lloyd Borrett, VSAG.

The breakers boomed along the dark beach at Tidal River, flickering blue-green-phosphorous like gentle peaceful howitzers firing in the dark. I watched the salt ocean rush in swift and steady, slow and back, hissing softly.

“Hey, John,” I said, “This is not too bad a place, is it?”

He was watching the rise of the moon, and the way that the moonlight moved in the water.

“This is a good place,” he said at last.

But strange: though this was indeed a good place to be, we had no wish to remain here. In that short time, the beach went familiar and vaguely boring. By morning we were ready to launch the dive boats from the beach and head out to the islands offshore, leaving the beach and the sand dunes to the beach goers.

A few hours after sunrise, we were miles out from the shore, with the dive boats droning along together in loose formation over a sea the colour of the sky, cutting our paths through the pristine waters.

John Lawler was at the helm of “Miles Ahead” his Haines Signature, concentrating on the demands of a boat captain. I

looked over the side and wondered if there was such a place in all the world as perfect. Maybe that’s what we’re really looking for, I thought, with all this seeking out new dive sites — maybe we are all looking for one, single, perfect place down there under the water, and when we find it, we will drift down to explore it and we will never need to dive anywhere again.

Maybe divers are just people who aren’t quite happy with the dive places that they’ve found so far, and as soon as they can locate that one dive spot where they can be as happy under the water as other people are on the land, they will stop seeking out new dive locations and not go exploring any more under the water.

Our talk about the fun of diving must be talk about the fun of disappearing under the water. Even the word “dive,” after all, is a synonym for disappear. Why, if I were to see, at our next dive site, my own perfect place, I would have no more wish to dive anywhere else.

It was an uncomfortable thought, and I looked at John, who paid me no attention other than to smile without looking at me because he was still enjoying speeding over the sea.

I looked out again, and the sea below changed for a moment to some of the most perfect dive places I had seen. Instead of water beneath, suddenly there was the delightful sea cave at North-East Dannevig Island, Wilsons Promontory, Victoria. Instead of water there was the huge letters on the magnificent stern of the SS President Coolidge, 62 metres down at Espiritu Santo, Vanuato.

Instead of water there was the thousands of fish enveloping me at Blue Maomao Arch in the Poor Knights Islands, New Zealand. Instead of water there was the colourful marine growth on the upturned hull of the HMS Hermes aircraft carrier, 55 metres down at Batticaloa, Sri Lanka. Instead of water there I was taking in the stunning beauty of the diverse marine life on Steve's Bommie at Ribbon Reef #3, Queensland.

Instead of water there was the wreck of the San Francisco Maru at Chuuk Lagoon, Micronesia and schools of Hammerhead Sharks at Darwin's Arch, Darwin Island, Galapagos and the unique, colourful marine life at North Wall Corner in Port Philip Bay, Victoria.

Day and night, dusk and dawn, storm and calm. All of them interesting, most of them pretty, some of them beautiful. But not one perfect.

Then the water was back below us and the engine power was coming in as John

pushed the throttle forward to close up with "Freediver", Alan Beckhurst's Trailcraft 610. He turned the helm over to me, and for a while, I nearly forgot about disappearing and diving and perfect places.

But not quite. Is there such a place that found, will bring an end to a diver's need to dive?

"It's all good," John said, over the sound of the engine.

"Yeah."

By now, the water was mirror smooth, reflecting the clouds in the sky. It was difficult to tell where the sea ended and the sky began.

It was about that time that the answer reached out and grabbed me by the neck. Why the water itself is the place to which we are disappearing, into which we dive!

No beer cans and cigarette butts strewn around the waves, no street signs or stoplights, no bulldozers changing sea to concrete. No room for anxiety, because it is always the same. No room for boredom because it is always different.

What do you know about that! I thought. Our one perfect place is the water itself! And I looked across at "Freediver" quickly skimming across the water and I laughed. ❖