

*Dive Scapa Flow* by Rod Macdonald

Whittles Publishing Ltd, Dunbeath, 2017, £30 (sb) 344 pages, illustrations, bibliography and index ISBN 9781849952903

*Dive Palau: The Shipwrecks* by Rod Macdonald

Whittles Publishing Ltd, Dunbeath, 2016, £30 (sb) 303 pages, illustrations, bibliography and index ISBN 9781849951708

These two offerings by Rod Macdonald represent some of the best of the current crop of shipwreck guides for recreational divers. As a genre this type of literature can be traced back to the dawn of sports diving in the middle of the last century. Whereas some areas, such as Scapa Flow have seen a number of these types of books appear over the years, other areas such as Palau have received less coverage.

The original purpose behind books of this type was to offer information on where to hire equipment boats etc. Then also to offer some guidance about the local wrecks and what might be seen on them. The quality of these books is variable, with some being remarkably informative and others being little more than lists of wrecks reworked from historical and hydrographic sources. These two books by Rod Macdonald represent some of the highest quality of diver guides currently available.

*Dive Scapa Flow* has been in print through several iterations since 1990 and has been, alongside Lawson Wood's *Scapa Flow Dive Guide* the go to reference book for those many hundreds of divers visiting Scapa Flow each year. It follows the usual sequence of the history of the scuttling of the High Seas Fleet in June 1919 and its subsequent salvaging over the following decades. These chapters are well illustrated with photographs from the Imperial War Museum and Orkney Archive among other sources. The stories are well known and retold ably.

The following chapters detail the shipwrecks themselves and they are given comprehensive treatment including photographs from a number of contributors. This is especially so of the remaining German wrecks which are the main draw for visiting divers. Whereas the earlier editions of this book illustrated the wrecks with artist's impressions, it is nice to see that multibeam images from a survey in 2006 have been included this time alongside the older paintings. They add a level of detail not previously seen. Macdonald's descriptions of shipwrecks are well done and it is clear he has a genuine passion for this subject, alongside his experiences of diving the wrecks himself since the early days of the 1980s.

One element of this new edition of *Dive Scapa Flow* is its seeming intention to be even more comprehensive than previous editions. In this regard it has got significantly more history heavy than earlier versions. This in part accounts for the nearly double page length over the 1998 edition; from 176 pages to 344 in 2017. For example the section covering the battleship SMS *König* is 30 pages in length, but only the last eight actually cover a description of the wreck.

This is fine for readers who love naval history, but one has to wonder whether it runs the risk of losing focus on the book's natural constituency, the recreational diver. On the positive side, the

history sections do contain some unique historical insights. In order to fill in the stories of the wrecks Macdonald has interviewed some of the salvors who worked on the remaining wrecks in the 1970s. This is a very useful adjunct to the stories of these wrecks and for a Scapa Enthusiast it is priceless stuff which I don't recall seeing covered elsewhere.

*Dive Palau: The Shipwrecks* follows a similar format. It mainly covers the ships sunk during the devastating American air attack on Palau in March 1944; a few weeks after the same had been carried out at the more well-known Truk Lagoon. As a dive guide this book can be considered definitive. It certainly won't be rivalled anytime soon. Macdonald used third party wreck information to compliment his own detailed research and extensive dives and has written a valuable guide to the wrecks. These include freighters, landing craft and downed American aircraft and have not received the attention it seems from this book that they do deserve.

The background history is well-observed and illustrated with archive photos from the US National Archives. As with *Dive Scapa Flow*, there are artist's impressions of the shipwrecks alongside an extensive selection of photographs of the wrecks. I was particularly fascinated by the section covering the wreck of the US destroyer USS *Perry*, mined in September 1944. In this instance, the artist's impression shows the effects of a mine strike well, with the bows folded back alongside the hull. This is just one example of plenty of great shipwreck stories and images to enjoy.

My only minor negative observations for the membership are that it is important to consider that these books are not high-end academe, nor are they intended to be. The expert eye will find amongst their pages minor factual errors and other anecdotal commonplaces which may not stand up to scrutiny. An absence of footnotes doesn't help in this regard, so the serious researcher needs to be a little wary. I also note the £30 cost of *Dive Scapa Flow* is for softback and the pages in my copy are already becoming a little loose; whereas *Dive Palau: The Shipwrecks* is hardback for the same price which seems a little odd.

I find Macdonald's work very engaging and have in particular have found *Dive Scapa Flow* a very useful book, for the reasons given. These books serve their market very well. Recreational divers seeking to enjoy diving on the remarkable shipwrecks in these two locations would do well to carry a copy of these guides with them. All shipwreck enthusiasts would also find these books to be well worth reading.

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