

SCUBA DIVING IN TRUK LAGOON



During WWII, Truk Lagoon in Micronesia was an anchorage for part of the Japanese Imperial fleet, before the Americans sank it. Now, divers like Andrew Hokin make pilgrimages there for the world's best wreck adventure.

Preparation "Prior to the trip, I did my rescue card – I'm a rescue diver and a trainee dive master. You get a briefing and a guide. You also need a good fitness level and, to attempt the deeper dives, good equipment."

How Good? "Awesome. I was surprised how clear and bright it was. The wrecks are in silty areas – some of them are dirty, some pristine, some have a lot of marine growth, it just depends where they are. The highlight was the San Francisco (at 60m). When I got onto the deck I could see for ages. It was amazing; there's a big deck-gun on the bow, there are sea mines and trucks in the hull and about four light infantry tanks lined up on the deck. You get really well looked after at the resort. The food is really cheap and good; there's also a bar where you can socialise with other dive groups."

How Difficult? The more dive experience you have, the more you'll do. "Depths range from about 20m: you can do the Fujikawa at 25m and the San Francisco at 60m. The first two days you'll do 25-30m, then the Nippo, which is 40m, and if the dive masters think you're capable – they may take you to the San Francisco."

Getting There "I flew from Cairns to Guam and got another plane from Guam to Truk Lagoon. You usually book it as a package and I did mine through Dive Adventures in Cairns. People from the resort pick you up from the airport – they do everything for you."

How Much? "About \$2800 for the package – flights (with Continental), board and a week's diving."

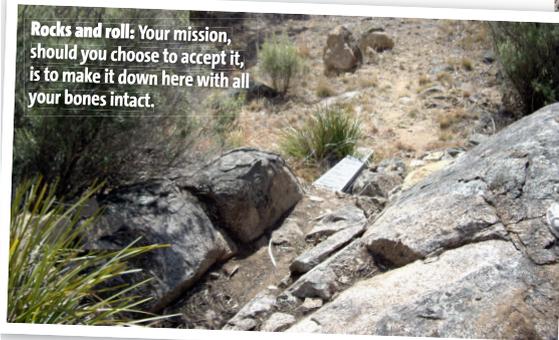
The Right Stuff "You can dive on their equipment, but to do the deeper dives, I wanted equipment that I was familiar with. I wanted to use my dive computer, my buoyancy compensator, my regulator – it's life-support equipment and it fits me. If you need anything extra, your tour party can supply it."

SUMMER IN THE SNOWIES

The sun may stop skiing at the SNOWY MOUNTAINS, but the mountain bike tracks are warming up

The sun is out, the air is clear, the trails are gnarly and my colleague Aaron is nearly in tears. It may be a beautiful day, but the Snowy Mountains are also still full of snow, deep powder that demands he go boarding on it, not bloody mountain biking.

But in a few weeks, and by the time you read this, the snow will be gone and then what do you do? Last year, *Alpha's* editor Rob went hiking here, but really, if you're going to do summer in the Snowies, you can do better than that. You've got to really test yourself.



Rocks and roll: Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to make it down here with all your bones intact.



Easy rider: *Alpha's* man is all smiles... On the outside, inside his bowels are liquid.

DAY 1

We have three very expensive (hired) bikes, a guide and a car. The bikes are for us, the guide comes with the bikes and the car is to get us up a hill east of Jindabyne that only people training for London 2012 would really want to climb. Once there, we helmet-glove-and-water-pack up and disappear into the bush.

Biking in these mountains has always generally meant going downhill. But from Jindabyne to Thredbo there are many kilometres of good cross-country trails – and they're constructing more all the time.

The start of the Tyrolean trail contains what the guide describes as "challenging cross-country". Within seconds we're confronted by a huge boulder that people apparently can ride over without sustaining severe injury; another area that looks like the surface of the moon; and a plank over a steep drop.

As beginners we're not cycling any of this; we do 7km of single-track trails, tight switch-backs, loose sand and hill climbs that are just a bitch. It's what the guide terms "very technical", which means we need to constantly work out braking (one light finger each on the brakes, or you disappear over the handlebars), gear changes, pedal position, weight distribution, saddle height and speed.

My enjoyment of the challenge and the scenery is offset by the fact that I can't get enough air in my lungs. It could be the altitude or my sheer lack of fitness, but every hill needs a minute's recovery period. My legs have turned to water. We cycle over a dam and up single tracks to a bay on the Jindabyne side of the dam wall, where we finish after two hours in the saddle. I can barely walk to the car.



DAY 2

Today, we are promised an easier ride, which is good because at the first sign of a hill my legs fall apart again. Pender Lea is a flatter, more intermediate trail outside Jindabyne, stretching from Alpine Way up to the edge of the Kosciusko National Park. There are a few obstacles and some tricky cornering, and it's amazing how fast the downhill sections seem with bush rushing past you.

We do 4km of beautiful scenic bush-riding, startling cows and the occasional roo along the way. There are plenty of options here – at least another 10km of winding track – if you want to climb into the hills. One day, maybe, but right now I'm pretty happy with what I've managed to do so far.

To go downhill, the guide tells me to slip back behind the saddle; to go uphill he tells me to match the gear to my weight and strength, instead of just picking the lowest gear and pedalling like a maniac. The best piece of advice from the guide is where to focus: if I look just in front of my wheel – what they call target fixation – I want to fall over all the time. Like race drivers, you want

to look at least another turn ahead and fixate on where you're going, not where you are. Another half an hour of dodgy cornering is a good lesson.

In the afternoon, we're in Thredbo cycling around the foot of the mountain. Aaron sees hundreds of snowboarders and makes groaning noises. "Boarders love mountain biking in summer. They're right into it," says the guide. This makes Aaron happier. There's a good season of biking to be had in the Snowies, and no matter what they say, it's not all downhill from here. – *Ivan Smith*

GETTING THERE

As a jumping-off point, Jindabyne is 460km south of Sydney and 180km south of Canberra. You can get there by car, train or bus.

WHERE TO STAY

Out of the snow season, accommodation from Jindabyne up to Thredbo is cheaper and a lot more available. Have a look at www.snowymountains.com.au/Where_to_stay.html

HOW MUCH?

Bikes, guides, instruction, repairs and information all available from the South East Mountain Biking Company: (02) 6457 6282. Prices vary according to your exact needs, but a complete package for two days, including everything you need is \$399.

WE WORE:

Skins male bib cycling longs, \$299, and camo long-sleeve top, \$109.99. Fluid Flow shorts, \$89.97, gloves, \$29.97, and lightweight spray jacket, \$69.97, from Anaconda. CamelBak M.U.L.E hydration pack, \$149.

We rode the following free-ride dual suspension mountain bikes:

- GT Force 1, \$4000.
- GT Marathon Pro, \$5500.
- Trek Fuel EX8, \$3600.

... Although you can get away with as little as \$1800 for a good all-purpose, all-terrain bike. You can also choose to hire one.