

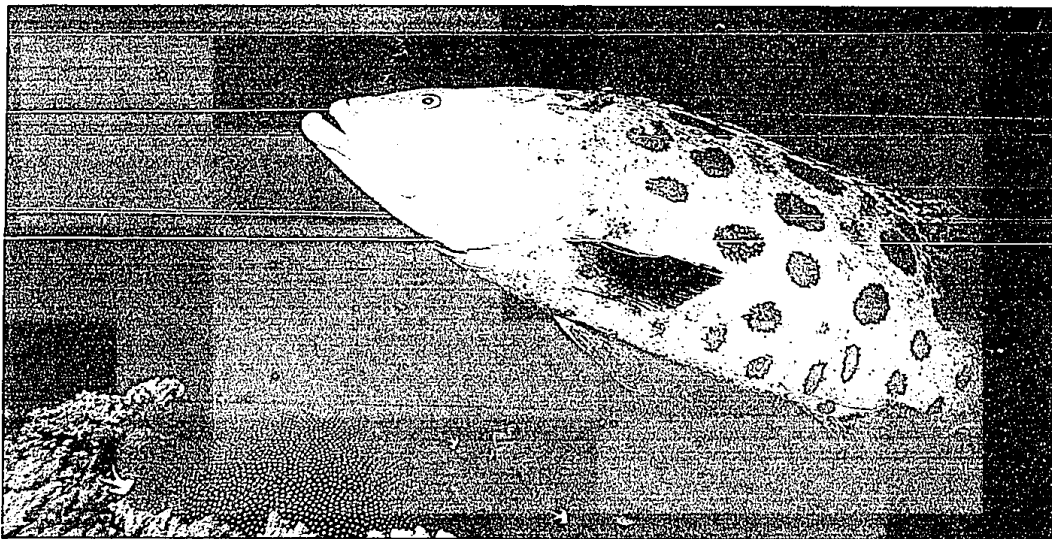
'Waltzing, Matilda'

From swagmen to billabongs, koala bears and collie trees, Australia's "wild west" is a sharp contrast to its more urbanized coasts. For more on the Outback, see Page 6D.

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At the famous Cod Hole in the Ribbon Reefs, members of the Rec Diving party hand-fed and mingled with Potato Cods, a member of the grouper family that can reach weights of up to 500 pounds.

AUSTRALIA

Reef is as attractive as shore

By Sue Mason
staff writer

Potato cods, weighing up to 400 pounds, and merry wrasse, or Napoleon fish, of similar size, gladly accept handouts from the tourists. A few white-tipped reef sharks cruise in to share in the bounty.

No, it's not a typical day at a marine life theme park. It's the Great Barrier Reef of Australia. And the tourists are diving enthusiasts from the Detroit metropolitan area.

"Pacific diving is so much different than Caribbean diving," said Mike Kohut of Recreational Diving of Royal Oak. "The fish are more colorful; there's more varieties of coral and invertebrates."

"And the diving in Australia is considered the best in the world," Kohut should know. He has been group leader on two Rec Diving trips to Australia, one in 1985 and the other in 1987.

For about \$3,000 a person, the divers are treated to a week of shipboard life and SCUBA diving along the Great Barrier Reef more than 200 miles offshore from Townsville, Queensland.

THEY ALSO spend a week touring the province from its northern beaches through the mountains and rain forest to the edge of the tablelands "to get a feel for the land," he said.

The Great Barrier Reef is a diver's paradise, a patchwork of passages, reefs and islands that stretches nearly 1,000 miles along the length of the Queensland coast.

Discovered in 1770 by Capt. James Cook, it is the richest and most diverse coral reef area in the world and is the only sign of life on earth visible from the moon.

Cook had been on a scientific voyage to chart the path of Venus across the face of the sun. Astronomers believed that with that information they would be able to calculate the distance between the earth and the sun.

His work done, Cook charted a course that he thought would take him back to England. He ended up discovering what is now Sydney harbor and the warm tropical waters of the Great Barrier Reef.

The reef offers divers plenty of excitement — soft and hard corals ranging from deep golden yellow to rich red in color and colorful fish, many of which are so iridescent they almost glow.

The Ribbon Reefs are the site of the famous Cod Hole, where divers are encouraged to hand feed potato cods and merry wrasse.

There also are opportunities to feed the more passive white-tipped reef sharks, a sharp contrast to their more well-known cousin, the great white shark.

Kohut is high on Australia because of the diving experiences and the Australians.

"THE BIG thing Australia has going for it is its people; they're fun and upbeat," he said. "They like Americans and they care about you. It's just a super country . . . next to the United States."

Tim Scheer of Redford shares Kohut's enthusiasm.

Scheer was totally inexperienced in ocean diving when he signed up for Kohut's 1987 trip. He had taken pool classes to learn SCUBA diving; his only other dive was in a stone quarry to gain his certification.

"Australia is set up very well to handle vacationers," he said. "They go out of their way for you."

Since it was his first real diving experience, Scheer, 26, decided to "go at it full steam ahead." And while it was enjoyable, he had to admit there was one time he was "pretty apprehensive."

Divers swim with a buddy and on one dive Scheer was so engrossed in his surroundings that he lost eye contact with his buddy for about 20 yards. He glanced out of the corner of his eye, saw something that he presumed was his buddy and kept swimming.

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Tim Scheer of Redford didn't think twice about signing up for the Australian diving trip even though he had no experience in ocean diving.

'The big thing Australia has going for it is its people; they're fun and upbeat.'

— Mike Kohut,
Rec Diving

R.U. Syrius

Karlos Barney



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Expo '88, bicentennial: Australia has it this year

By Iris Sanderson Jones
special writer

World Expo '88, the highlight of Australia's 200th birthday party, will be held from April 30 through Oct. 30 in the city of Brisbane.

Brisbane is in the state of Queensland, on the northeast coast of the island continent, and is one of the jumping-off places for the Great Barrier Reef.

The theme of the fair is Leisure in the Age of Technology. If you attended Expo '88 in Vancouver, Canada, you may see some similarities. This year's fair also is built on a waterway in the very heart of a city — 99 acres on the south bank of the Brisbane River, less than 1,000 yards from the heart of downtown.

The giant canvas sun sails, symbolic of Australia's first fleet, dominate the Expo scene in this city of 1.1 million. It is a prosperous modern city. Ground already has been broken for the world's tallest building, which will be 1,400 feet high, a few feet higher than the Sears Tower in Chicago.

Brisbane is the capital of the state of Queensland. The Aussies winter along the Queensland coast the way Americans winter in Florida. Winter temperatures are comparable to those in Tampa or Orlando.

Remember that seasons are reversed Down Under, so April to October in Australia is like October to April in North America, autumn moving through winter into spring.

FIGURE THE weather out this way: Take the U.S. from Florida to Cincinnati and turn it upside down, because the weather gets warmer as you go north. The middle of the winter is mild in Sydney, about 50-70 degrees; Melbourne is cool to frosty. They get light snows in Tasmania. It is always hot in the inland desert areas.

If you plan to travel Down Under, book tickets soon because demand exceeds supply. You may want to book a tour with a tour company that reserved seats long ago. The same with accommodations. Check with your travel agent.

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Mickey Jones

Just the mention of Australia conjures up images of one its most well-known inhabitants, the koala bear, which includes the eucalyptus tree as one of its favorite handouts.