



Interview with BLUE Magazine

Catherine Bates interviews Agnes for the BLUE magazine feature on female deep, wreck and cave divers.

The [BLUE Magazine](#) is the official magazine of the Chamber of Diving and Watersports in Egypt. BLUE is packed with interesting articles on diving and water sports in Egypt - it is online and free to download.

Who was the biggest influence in directing you into the realm of technical diving?

I didn't plan to become a technical diver, it just happened. It was a natural progression to want to dive deeper, I wanted to pursue largely untouched and pristine wrecks and explore further inside extensive cave systems. I had to start playing with more advanced dive gear and mixes gasses in order to do so. I kept diving and steadily building on my experiences and as a result I have ended up exploring the most amazing places on earth.

My first taste of cave diving came only a couple of years into my diving career. Back in 2004 a bunch of us went snorkeling over Piccaninnie Ponds, in Mt Gambier. Mt Gambier is Australia's cave country and is littered with beautiful caves and deep sinkholes. Pics, as it is affectionately called, is actually a large sinkhole and it eventually drops off to 125m. Up the top however it has a vibrant and active ecosystem, with plenty of animals like fish, eels and to my great delight, turtles. The ponds offer perfect visibility and as I snorkeled on the surface chasing some little turtle, I swam over a lip and suddenly the bottom dropped off from below me. A large shaft dropped down to 40m and there was just this darkness that beckoned. As I saw the diver ascending from the depths I thought - I want to go down there!

What is your proudest technical achievement to date and why?

Pushing out Baptizing Spring, a cave system in Florida, from a cave that was 500 ft to a cave that is now in excess of 8000 ft was definitely a fantastic and mind blowing experience. At first it

was hard yakka, I had to battle through very low passage filled with sand and then muddy clay. There is a good 1000 ft of wriggling, in between a rock and a hard place; the restriction is unrelenting. Yet I pushed it, I persevered, I believed... and more to the point I fit! Eventually the cave opened up a little... then it opened up some more. I kept going back, day after day for three weeks and each day unceremoniously dumped reel after reel into the cave and yet it just didn't end - it was incredible. Those two weeks were amongst the best of my life, where I did very little other than sleep, eat, knot line and explore. It is difficult to describe the burst of energy and pure adrenalin that I was feeling at this time. Nothing can beat the moment you unwind a reel into completely new and uncharted territory. One feels pure, unadulterated joy and happiness, all peppered with a bit of a thrill.

What is your fondest memory of diving?

One of my most exciting underwater experiences was the recovery of the tortoise shell and crocodile skull from a cave in the Bahamas. Both were a cool 3000 years old and recovered in faultless condition - perfectly intact! We were there to photograph and film the whole event with a National Geographic crew and it was an incredible experience.

The dive itself was gnarly as hell, a whole team of divers trying to light up the recovery sequence. The silt was raining down on us from the slope, percolation was coming down on us from the ceiling, not to mention the mess that comes with excavation. There was a feeling of great accomplishment when the remains made it safely into the container. It was thrilling to watch the scientists when the boxes with the remains made it to the surface, their eyes lit up the moment they saw the remains - they had seen nothing quite like it. Then again - ever dive is a good dive. :)

Why do you think there are so few female technical divers?

Just being a girl and a tech diver hardly gives me the right to speculate and speak on behalf of all female divers. The reality is that there are now more female technical divers out there than ever before, as the training and the opportunities to dive at that level have become more widespread and readily available. But there is technical diving and then there is the pointy edge of exploration.

To excel at any sport requires dedication, commitment and a single mindedness that in this case means that diving comes first, ahead of everything else. It has to be your life and the very reason for your existence. If you are pushing the boundaries, the inherent risks associated with diving increase incrementally. This is not for everyone, regardless of whether you are male or female.

Have you ever been to the Red Sea?

I haven't been to the Red Sea yet but would definitely love to go one day. I have heard amazing things about the area so it is definitely on the list.

What is your next project?

I'm currently based in Australia, which is a good place to be, as there are many opportunities to find new cave systems. I hope to go down south and explore some of the wilder parts of Tasmania. Tasmania has all the good stuff when it comes to cave diving; cold water, high flow, low visibility, difficult access to the water's edge and sharp rocks that have a habit of slicing through drysuits like butter. It is still very much unexplored because of the logistics and technical difficulties involved. It should be a lot of fun!

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