

**5<sup>th</sup> November 1990: John Rowe interviewed by Andrew Olle on ABC Radio 2BL regarding the Underwater Nature Trail**

Andrew Olle (AO)

It won't be long before Sydney's nature lovers will be swapping their walking boots for flippers. Sydney's first permanent underwater trail is said to open in Gordons Bay between Coogee and Clovelly Beaches. Now the idea for an underwater trail goes back as far as 1985, apparently when a couple of divers Rick Poole and Dennis Hunt approached the State Government for permission to install the trail. While the marine life in Gordons Bay is fairly common to Sydney's coastline nowhere is it now more accessible. For John Rowe, Gordons Bay is his backyard and he began working with the project in February this year. He joins me now in the studio this morning.

AO

Good to see you here.

John Rowe (JR)

Good morning Andrew

AO

So how does this work?

JR Well it is a little similar to a bush-walking track that we all enjoy in the mountains in that if you were to venture off in the wilderness you would more than likely get lost. What we are trying to do here underwater, that is a new underwater wilderness is to make it simple and easy for people to go diving and also to be given the opportunity to learn more about the underwater world.

AO

But if it is an underwater nature trail, now to be a bushwalker you can be fairly expected to go on a bushwalk as long as you are with the right people and not too hard a track. But what sort of experience do you need for this?

JR

You need to be a certified scuba diver that..

AO

Oh!

JR

That is the No 1 prerequisite in that being by its very nature underwater, you have to be able to breathe underwater in order to follow the trail. This is obtained of course by diving with scuba gear.

AO

You have to stay underwater?

JR

You have to stay underwater. It is not something you can follow from the surface actually. I think a prerequisite of the Department of Land's lease is that nothing is to show at the low tide mark. To give you an idea of how it is actually constructed it's a 44 gallon drum times 24 cut down to a third in size, filled with 200 kilograms of concrete with a stainless steel bolt in the middle. Each of these drums are about 25 metres apart and are connected by 6 millimetre galvanised chain so that when a diver enters the water he simply goes to the first drum swims the course of about 600 metres that will bring him

back to the point where he first started off. When you first learn to dive it's a little disconcerting being underwater and there is a lot of divers who learn to dive but don't follow up on that for many reasons but one of them I think is that they are not at all confident and so the idea is to make the people a little more confident

AO

Its training as well isn't it?

JR

Its training as well, but you, if you are not a certified diver you can only go on the underwater trail with a certified dive instructor from one of the training agencies, PADI, FAUI, or NAUI.

AO

Why would an underwater diver, I mean, a certified diver want to go on this underwater trail. What's so special about it?

JR

What's so special about it is that is not finished we are hoping to be able to have guide cards and drawings of fish, so that a diver will be able to identify fish.

AO

Drawings of fish?

JR

Yes, drawings of fish or pictures..

AO

You mean on the surface?

JR

No, no, no, drawings of fish on say a piece of plastic that people can identify the fish as they swim along.

AO

Come to that is it that we are diving to see false fish now.

JR

No, no, no. there is unfortunately the poor old fish. I was talking to my daughter Harriet yesterday and she was on a visit to one of the islands up in Queensland and one of her boy friends cousins won a mullet throwing competition and they were throwing mullet around. Now my wife and I were talking about this and we said if they were throwing, dead cats around there would be an enormous outcry. Once you have spent time underwater it is just amazing how beautiful friendly and lovely fish are and they swim right up to your face mask. So we were diving just the other day and a Moray Eel came up to my face mask and he was looking straight into my eyes and his silly little sharp teeth in his mouth was open wide. Now there is so much to see underwater and yet we have this attitude where you can put a live fish on a line and throw it into the water and catch another fish and that is perfectly acceptable behaviour, and forgive me for going on, what I am trying to say is that fish are extraordinary friendly, they're much easier to approach underwater, they get much more quickly used to divers and you can hand feed them. Now you can't do that in the wilderness,

AO

Is Gordons Bay renowned, does its natural fish I mean are you going to have I mean why do we have to have drawings of fish underwater?

JR

The fish, the drawings will actually be on a slate that divers, we hope, will take with them underwater.

AO

I see it is to help them identify them?

JR

It is to help them identify them. We are actually not going to have paintings of fish, oh , oh, underwater I think that would be awful, to think that you would even be suggesting that Andrew..

AO

I thought that was what you were suggesting Eh when does this get underway?

JR

I'm sorry about that. Well so the chains are connected. I have had the final seal of approval on Sunday when my wife came along, she absolutely refused to work with me on the trail for six months, but she said when it was finished it's just delightfully comfortable and I can find around with absolutely no problems whatsoever.

AO

She was the litmus test obviously, alright John, we'll leave it there Thank you John

JR

Thank you Andrew.