

DIVING/Snorkelling

CREDIT: SV Soggypaws...Rather than blundering around unknown prospective sites, with unknown current, wave and wind conditions, the professional operations can take you right to good sites for the prevailing conditions, that match your interests and your experience level. They can also take you to sites that are otherwise impossible or impractical to reach from a yacht or dinghy. To minimize costs, we have found it possible to get a group of divers together (like 4-6 divers from several boats), and then approach the dive operators for a 'package deal'. This often can shave significant dollars off the published cost of a single dive trip, as they can afford to give a discount if they are assured of a full dive boat. This works especially well in low-volume places like Tonga, or the off-season anywhere.

Other Dive Advice: For cruisers looking for diving and snorkeling spots in Tonga, you should have a copy of the cruising guide [Sailingbird Guide to the Kingdom of Tonga](#). (available in Vava'u at the Megapode book shop near the Moorings base in Neiafu or Café Tropicana, or online from [Amazon.com](#)). This book not only covers anchorages like a typical cruising guide, but also denotes the best dive and snorkel areas, with little icons on the chartlets.

Dive Sites in the Vava'u Group of Tonga

[Jump to Ha'apai Sites](#)

Below is a list of the most popular dive sites in the Vava'u area of Tonga, many of which are accessible by cruising boats.



[View Online in Google Maps](#)

Each site is linked to a page with detailed info about access, dive profile, and pictures.

Site Name	Latitude	Longitude	Description
Clan MacWilliam	18°40.348'S	173°59.351'W	400' Wreck in Neiafu Harbor 80-120 feet
Swallows Cave	18°40.945'S	174°02.845'W	Nice cave for diving or snorkeling, near the Kapa/Port Maurelle anchorages
Mushrooms	18°40.285'S	174°03.403'W	Just across the way from Swallows Cave
Sea Fans	18°39.664'S	174°04.040'W	East side of Tu'ungasika Island, in the North Shore area
Split Rock	18°39.488'S	174°04.111'W	NW side of Tu'ungasika Island, in the North Shore area
China Gardens	18°39.462'S	174°04.234'W	North side of Tu'ungasika Island, in the North Shore area
Fotula Rock	18°38.920'S	174°04.064'W	North Shore area
White Patch	18°38.920'S	174°04.064'W	North Shore area
North Shore	18°38.329'S	174°03.968'W	North Shore area
Rhino	18°40.050'S	174°03.425'W	North Shore area
Caddy Shack	18°40.263'S	174°05.067'W	North east tip of Hunga Island

Shark Tooth	18°40.975'S	174°03.932'W	On the north tip of Kitu Island
The Gap	18°41.296'S	174°04.170'W	North tip of Nuapupu Island
Mariner's Cave	18°41.462'S	174°04.494'W	Northwest side of Nuapupu Island
Coral Gardens	18°42.630'S 18°42.971'S 18°43.396'S	174°06.144'W 174°06.231'W 174°06.336'W	West of Vaka'eitu (Anchorage 16). Beautiful reef and wall in 8'-50'
Langito'o Island Reef	18°43.668'S 18°43.835'S	174°05.490'W 174°05.336'W	South East of Vaka'eitu (Anchorage 16). Nice reef in 5'-45'
The Pagodas	18°43.990'S 18°44.242'S	174°05.044 W 174°04.911 W	South East of Vaka'eitu (Anchorage 16). Nice coral structures in 10'-60'
Ovaka Wall	18°44.668'S	174°06.972'W	
Ovaka's Coral Canyons	18°44.698'S	174°06.626'W	Beach dive at the west end of Ovaka, in a coral area
The Nursery	18°45.328'S	174°02.544'W	Near Euakafa, Anchorage 32
Blue Coral	18°45.927'S	174°02.337'W	Near Euakafa, Anchorage 32
Little Knob	18-43.504'S	174-00.148'W	Near Tapanā, Anchorage 11. Coral mound.

Diving the Clan MacWilliam Wreck

Vava'u Tonga

Location

In Neiafu Harbor - 18-40.348 S / 173-59.351 W

Accessible by dinghy from any anchorage in the harbor.



General Info

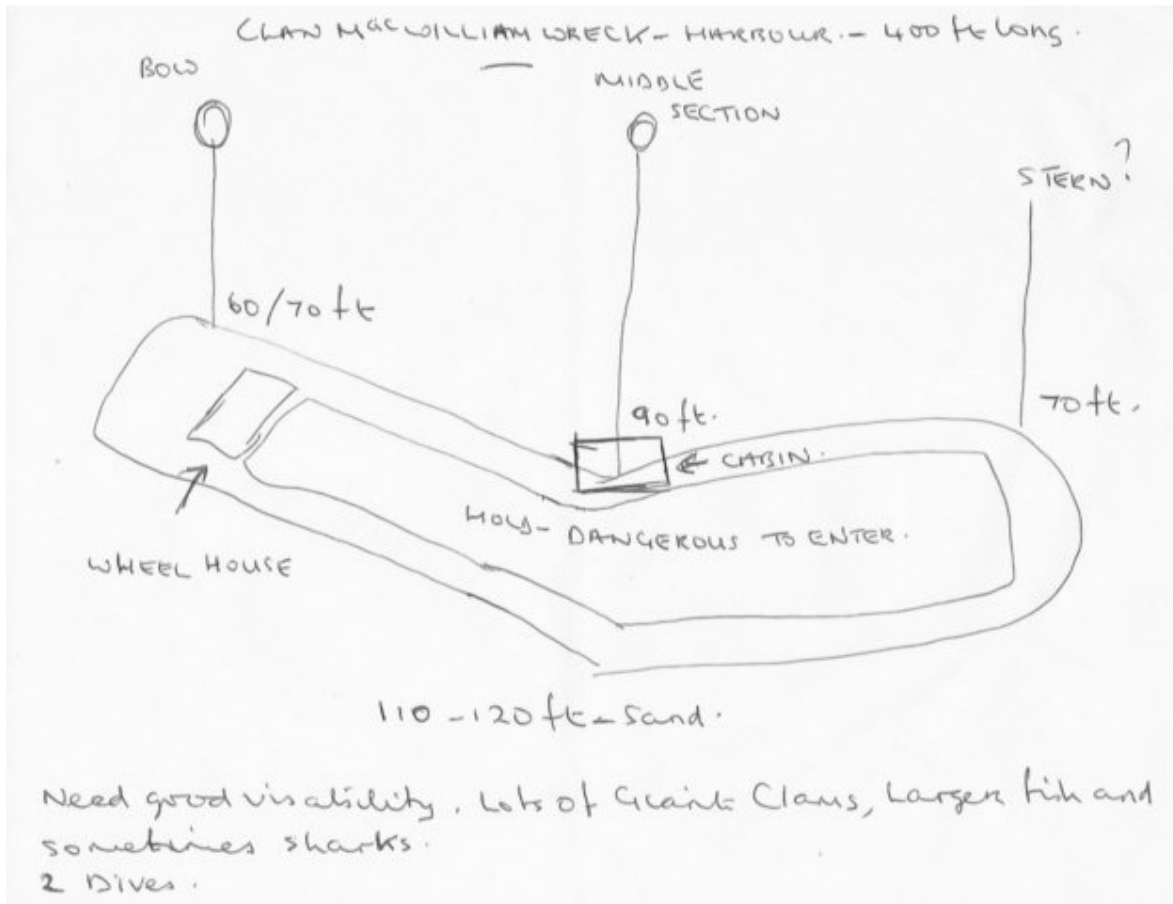
The Clan McWilliam lies in 122' (37m) of water at the far end of Neiafu harbor. She was a 6,000-ton, 423' (127m) copra steamer, built in 1918. In December 1927, she steamed into Neiafu harbor with a smoldering fire in her #3 hold. The forward holds collapsed, cracking open several plates. The captain and engineer tried to save the ship by running it aground in the shallows at the foot of the bay but didn't make it in time. One story has it that the captain locked the engineer into the engine room to keep him from abandoning the effort. (See the official version [below](#) from the inquiry conducted in Nuku'alofa immediately after the incident)

The wreck superstructure starts at about 60 feet, and the bottom is at 120 feet. Most of the deck is between 80-95' deep, so your bottom time will be limited to only about 20 minutes. If you are going to explore the whole wreck thoroughly, plan to do it in 2 dives, turning around at the main cabin (approx in the middle of the wreck).

Good visibility is essential for this dive. This wreck is old, and it is dangerous to attempt any penetration of the wreck.

The sketch shows 3 buoys marking the wreck (bow, middle, and stern). The bow buoy is to the east. The middle buoy is missing (as of early 2012). The stern buoy now trails off the wreck horizontally for about 100 feet, at 15-25' depth (a good place to do your safety stop). On a day with decent visibility, you can just start to see the wreck below you at about 30'.

Dive Profile



Dive Profile & Sketch courtesy of [Two If By Sea Sail & Dive Charters](#)

More Clan MacWilliam Info

Excerpt from the Official Inquiry about the Sinking:

From Fiji she proceeded to Nukualofa, Tonga, for copra, and thence to Vavau, the main northerly island of the Friendly Islands. She anchored in Neiafu Harbour, Vavau, at 7.27 a.m. on the 23rd December, 1927, and commenced loading copra. She loaded into holds Nos. 1 and 2. Loading continued throughout the day. Loading in No. 2 was completed at 1.30 a.m. on the 24th December, 1927, and the labour gang, which consisted of Pacific Islanders, was transferred to No. 1. About 1.55 a.m. on the same morning, the hatchman, Aleck Williams, a half caste Samoan, went down into No. 2 to see if any of the labour was still in the hold. He observed that fire had broken out. He states in his evidence that he saw one end of a wire sparking, and that he then saw a flame in the copra dust. He raised the alarm, and Joseph Hall Mellor, Second Mate, who was on watch, gave orders for hoses to be connected up and all hands to be called. The Second Mate went into the hold with fire extinguishers, which he fired without effect. At this time Apprentice Freestone, Mr. Johnson and Jeremiah Bryce were in the hold endeavouring to fight the fire, but to no effect. Shortly after 2 a.m. three hoses were playing on the fire, which by this time, according to the evidence of the Mate, looked like a blazing furnace, spreading all the time. At 3.30 a.m. No. 1 was ablaze. It contained copra. At 4.30 a.m. the fire was gaining ground, and the steamer was shifted to the head of the harbour, where she anchored in 20 fathoms-latitude 18° 40' 15" S., longitude 173° 59' 27" W. Flooding was ordered by the Master at 6.50 a.m., and shortly afterwards two life boats were lowered. At 9 a.m. the foremast sank, and shortly after the starboard side fell in. Throughout the day the fire increased in force, and at 4 o'clock a.m. on the 25th the port side fell in. At 6.45 a.m. No. 3 hatch burst into flames, and at

8.30 a.m. the stokehold bulkhead was red hot. At 8.45 a.m. the ship buckled, and the Master gave orders to abandon ship. At 9 a.m. the ship broke, plunged and sank rapidly.

The Court further finds that when the steamer dived before sinking, the Master, William Thomson, was on the ladder on his way to the boat, and that he went down with the ship and was drowned. At this time the Chief Engineer, John G. Dishington, was in, or near to, his cabin, and the Court finds that he sank with the ship and was drowned. Throughout the fire these two officers directed operations in a calm and collected manner, and the Court, in placing on record its high opinion of their conduct, extends its sympathy to the relatives bereaved.

[PDF File of the Entire Published Inquiry Findings](#)

Diving Swallows Cave Vava'u Tonga



Location

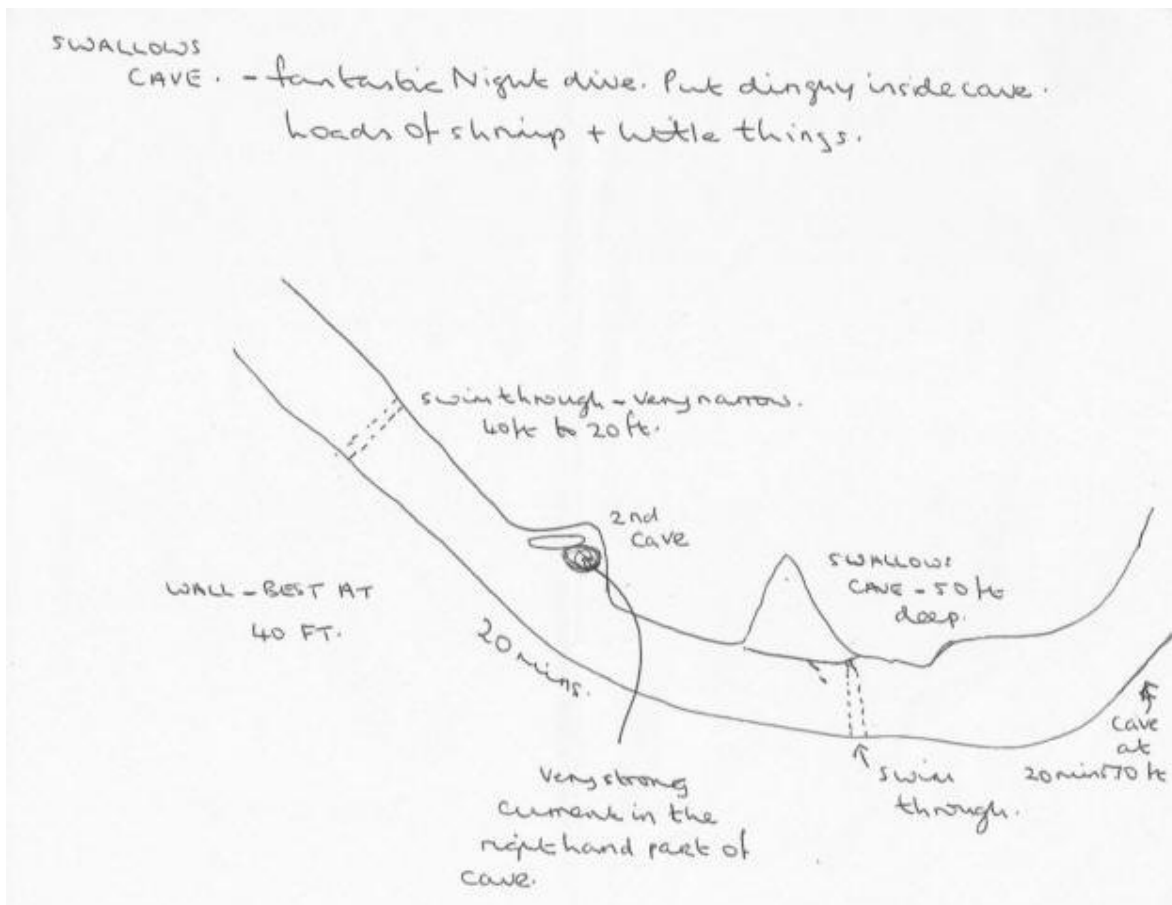
18-40.945 S / 174-02.845 W

Accessible by dinghy from Mala (Anchorage 6) or Port Maurelle (Anchorage 7) Anchorages.

General Info

Swallows Cave is a visible cave on the NW corner of Kapa Island. It can be done as a snorkel or a dive. Since the cave mouth faces west, it is best to do this in the afternoon. It is also a nice night dive in settled weather.

Dive Profile



In calm weather, you can (carefully) drive your dinghy into the mouth of the cave, and tie it to a small pinnacle rock at the back of the cave. Be careful on entry in case other divers or snorkelers are in the area. The cave mouth is about 15' deep and about 20' wide.



Take your time and explore the cave, snorkeling. On the surface, you can see inscriptions in the wall dating back to the late 1800's. There is also a second cave that you can scramble back into. Birds are nesting in the roof of the cave.

Once you are finished exploring at the surface, descend to the cave bottom. The cave bottom is at about 60'. Inside the cave it is somewhat barren, but still interesting. In the afternoons, the schools of small fish, and the light streaming in the cave, and people silhouetted against the cave mouth makes some very interesting (and challenging) photography.

As you swim back towards the mouth, there is a second swim through at about 40', on the left (south) side of the entrance area. Exit the cave via this swim through. From here, you can turn either left or right.

To the left, explore along the wall for about 20 minutes, and you will encounter another cave at about 70' deep.

To the right, explore along the wall at about a 40-50'. At this depth, you will not see the entrance to the second cave, which is only about 10' deep. After about 20 minutes of diving at 40', you should encounter a narrow swim through that angles up and exits the same wall at about 20'. This is a good way to finish your dive.

If you explore the 2nd cave, be aware that there can be a VERY strong current in one part of that cave (see sketch).

Dive Profile & Sketch courtesy of [Two If By Sea Sail & Dive Charters](#)



Notes

Diving Sea Fans Vava'u Tonga

Location

18-39.664 S / 174-04.040 W

General Info

Sea Fans is

Dive Profile



Dive Profile & Sketch courtesy of [Two If By Sea Sail & Dive Charters](#)

Notes

Diving Split Rock Vava'u Tonga

Location

18-39.488 S / 174-04.111 W

General Info

Dive Profile

Split Rock.

If current goes out
start at Arch.

If current coming
in start at
Small Rock.

Swim
through.

Arch.
70ft.

3 mins top in 20 ft.
at top of
gully.

- mark on Rock on
island. Looks like
top of an opening.

Arch - can
be seen from
land.

TU'INGASIKA
Island.

Cave

swim
through
60ft.

Sand
bottom.

2mins.

Split
Rock.

About 60ft long

40 ft
for 13 mins

- small rock

Sand
Patch.

This is also the beginning of China Gardens. This is a
beautiful coral garden. Goes down to 90 ft.

Dive Profile & Sketch courtesy of [Two If By Sea Sail & Dive Charters](#)

Notes

Diving China Gardens
Vava'u Tonga

Location

18°39.462'S / 174°04.234'W

General Info

China Gardens is the name given to an acre or so of coral ridges in an area just north and west of Split Rock. This is an area frequently visited by the local dive shops. Sea Fans, Split Rock, and China Gardens are all different sides of the same small island, and though close together, each is a completely different dive. Dive Vava'u also calls this dive 'Mushrooms'.

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Dive Profile

Diving North Shore Vava'u Tonga



Location

18°38.329'S / 174°03.968'W

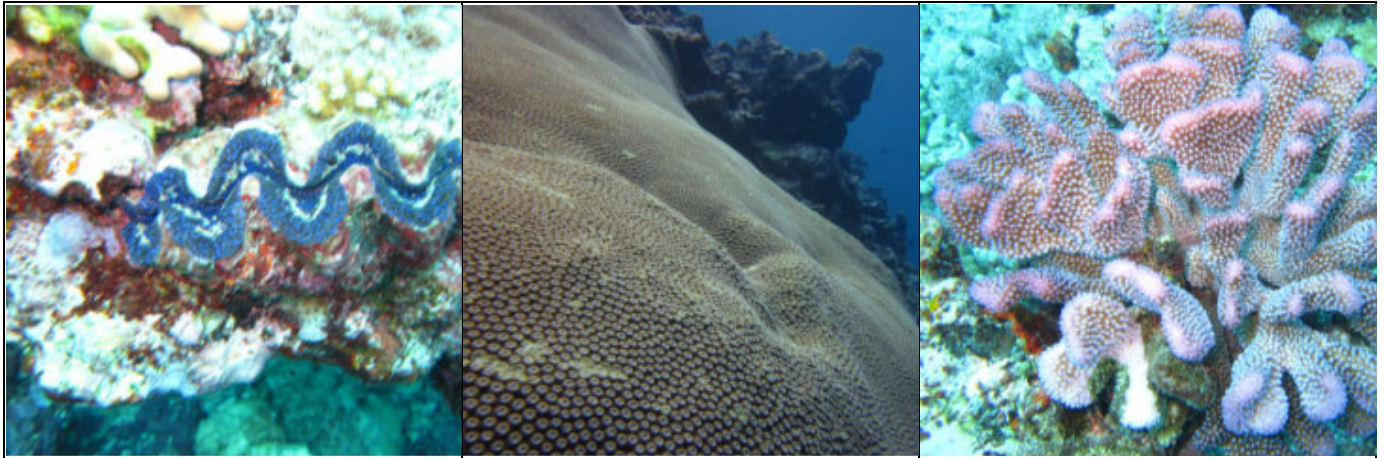
General Info

This dive site is nearly 4 miles from the closest good anchorage (Mala #6 or Port Maurelle ##7)--a bit far for a dinghy full of dive gear. A reasonable day anchorage, in settled weather, can be found at 18°39.117'S / 174°03.497 (Per *Ken's Guide to the Kingdom of Tonga*, see Port of Refuge anchorage). From here, it is possible to dive all of the North Shore area sites by dinghy.

Dive Profile

The North Shore dive starts from a protected cove (in E-SE winds) where a small boat can be anchored in sand and rocks in about 30'. Proceed NW towards the point to the North, where there is a very nice wall. Traverse the wall at about 60-70', and look carefully inside the small holes in the wall (a dive light helps). There are a number of scorpionfish and banded coral shrimp living in the holes. Continue along the wall until you reach some big boulders on the north side of the point, and ascend to about 30-40' and go back along the wall toward the boat.

You can end your dive in the coral areas between the wall and the boat, in 20-25'.



Notes

Diving Rhino Vava'u Tonga

Location

18°40.050'S / 174°03.425'W

General Info

Located on the western shore of Neiafu (in the general area referred to as 'North Shore'). This makes a good second dive for one of the deeper dives in this area. It might be possible to anchor a dinghy in this area from which to dive (we did it from a dive boat who drifted above us).

The day we did this dive, the wind was blowing about 15 knots ENE, and the swell report was about 2.5 meters from the SE, but we had very gentle conditions in this spot.

Dive Profile

The dive begins near the shore in about 15-20'. In this area are a series of huge coral-topped rocks. The outer (western) edge of the rocks are in about 40-50'. They are on a wall that drops down to over 100'. But most of the good stuff is in 25-60'.

From the waypoint, proceed north among the rocks. There is a lot to see along the bottom and sides of the rocks. But check the tops of each rock. The second or third huge rock has a very large colony of anemones (3-4 meters square). It's amusing to sit and watch the anemone fish play in the gentle surge.

Our divemaster carried a flashlight, and spent the next 40 minutes or so flashing in all the small nooks and crannies in the western face of the rocks, looking for interesting things to show us. We found 2 varieties of small pipefish, nudibranchs, crinoids, lots of soft and hard corals, and lots of fish.

We swam north against a very gentle current and then drifted back south with the current.

This was a very enjoyable second dive, with lots of profile.

Notes

Diving Caddy Shack Vava'u Tonga

Location

18°40.263'S / 174°05.067'W

General Info

Dive Profile



Dive Profile & Sketch courtesy of [Two If By Sea Sail & Dive Charters](#)

Notes

Diving Shark Tooth Vava'u Tonga

Location

18°40.975'S / 174°03.932'W

On the north east side of Kitu Island.

General Info

Kitu is a small island off the tip of Nuapupu island, near the Mala (#6) and Port Maurelle (#7) anchorages, easily within dinghy distance of both anchorages. Unfortunately, there is no place to secure a dinghy for this dive. It is best done with 2 pairs of divers, and one pair watches the dinghies and the other dives.

Dive Profile

Note that this sketch is oriented with North down.



This dive starts at the cave in the sketch. There is usually some current here, unless you are diving at slack tide. So when you get in the water, you need to be ready to descend quickly and enter the cave to get out of the current.

The cave bottom is about 40', and it's a fairly large cave. If you want to fully explore the cave, a dive light would be helpful. In the back of the cave, to the left, there is a shelf where some small white-tipped sharks hang out. There is also a small air pocket in the cave, and you can surface, if you like. There are also sometimes sea snakes, but they are shy and disappear if they see dive lights.

If you check the dark pockets carefully with a dive light, there are a bunch of very interesting things to see. Moray eels, red pipefish, and a Papuan Scorpionfish. There are also nudibranchs, feather stars, sponges, etc. Exit the cave to your left (north), down and out through one of two arches, and proceed counter-clockwise around the north tip of the island, and down the west side.

Outside the cave, there is a nice wall at 40-50' with coral and fish. If you have someone in a dinghy trailing you, you can just proceed on around the island.

Our exit point was at approximately 18°41.12'S / 174°04.084'W

Dive Profile & Sketch courtesy of [Two If By Sea Sail & Dive Charters](#)

Notes

Diving The Gap Vava'u Tonga

Location

18-41.296 S / 174-04.170 W North tip of Nuapupu Island

Accessible by big dinghy in settled weather from Mala (#6), Port Maurelle (#7), and Nuku (#8). This is a few hundred meters north of Mariner's and would be a good dive to combine with a [Mariner's Cave](#) dive or snorkel.

General Info

The Gap is a gap at the north end of Nuapupu Island, a few miles SW of Neiafu. You can anchor a dinghy or small boat at the waypoint in about 25' of water in a white spot (sand/rock clear of coral).

Dive Profile

Enter the water in about 25 feet, and proceed north and east, around the northern tip of Nuapupu, and into the gap between Nuapupu and the small island to the north. There are many huge boulders in this area and several nice swim-throughs.

The bottom here is 15'-80' (and down to about 90' in the gap).

In the gap itself, there are often pelagic fish.

Along the way, there are sea fans, sea whips, soft corals, hard corals, nudibranchs, and the usual variety of colorful South Pacific reef fish.

Return via roughly the same route you took on the way out, and finish your safety stop over the coral heads under the boat.

Notes

Diving Mariner's Cave Vava'u Tonga

Location

18-41.451 S / 174-04.492 W

Accessible by big dinghy from Port Maurelle (Anchorage #7). You could make one trip and dive [The Gap](#) and Mariner's Cave as a nice 2-tank dive.

General Info

Mariner's Cave is a cave on the west wall of the north end of Nuapupu Island, a few miles SW of Neiafu. Unlike Swallows Cave, which can be entered on the surface, the entry to Mariner's Cave is 1 to 3 meters underwater, and you have swim about 3 meters underwater to be able to come up inside the cave. This can be done as a snorkel or a dive.

The cave faces west, so the best time of day to make this dive is in mid-afternoon or later, when the natural lighting is stronger in the cave.

Once inside the only light is the ethereal blue coming through the underwater entrance, and the seal is so tight that when the swell rolls in, the water compresses the air in the cave fast enough to produce an instant fog-out! As the swell ebbs, the air comes as instantly crystal clear.

A flashlight is useful, but not absolutely necessary in the afternoon.

Background, courtesy of [Gwen Hamlin on Tackless II](#): This cave is named after William Mariner, who wrote about Tonga in the 1800's.

Mariner was a 14-year-old clerk aboard an English privateer -- the *Port Au Prince* -- the crew of which was massacred by Tongans in the Ha'apai Island Group in 1806. Mariner was spared, and was virtually adopted by King Finow, and during his four years living here, he absorbed a tremendous amount about the culture which is recorded in the volume [Tonga Islands: William Mariner's Account](#), published by John Martin, MD in 1817. (A great read!) Anyway, the story goes that "in former times" there was a tyrannical leader who mistreated his subjects. One of his chiefs, hoping to free the people of the tyranny, planned a rebellion, but he was caught and condemned to be drowned at sea with, as they tended to do in those days, all his family and relations. A young chief was secretly in love with one of the condemned man's daughters, a maiden to whom he would otherwise have had no access (she was promised to someone of higher rank), so, thinking quickly, he hurried to her abode, declared himself, and explained the situation and her options (none). Fortuitously, she had been secretly smitten with him, and putting her trust in her savior, allowed him to spirit her away in his canoe and hide her in this cave. The young chief kept her stashed for two or three months, bringing food, water and bedding as he could, until he was able to arrange to be sent on an expedition to Fiji. On his way out from Vava'u, he stopped his canoes, left his men perplexed as he dived into the water and disappeared, only to return with his

maiden fair, and off they sailed to Fiji where they lived (happily, of course) until the tyrant died.

On learning this tale, Mariner was skeptical about her ability to survive in the cave which has no evident source of fresh air, and took it upon himself to find an opening. Although he was not successful, it was later discovered that there is a fissure that only gets exposed at low tide (it was high tide when Mariner looked) which does allow the cave to breathe!

Dive Profile

Proper entry is under the pinkish rock face on the wall. You can see the black of the hole from the surface. Go to the waypoint and look for the pink rock on the wall, and the black hole under water. There really isn't any place to anchor here--most private divers go in pairs and take turns diving the cave while the other stays in the boat.

There are 2 entrances to Mariner's Cave. One is 10' (3m) down, accessible by snorkeling. The other is at 40' down.

The best dive plan is to go in the 10' part, explore the cave, then into the deep area, and out the 40' swim-through. There is a big lobster in Mariner's Cave near the 40' swim-through--look, don't molest!

When you come out of the cave and turn left, there's a nice wall. Proceed down the wall. At about 30 minutes down the wall, at 40', there is a sand patch, and there are 2 swim-through's at about 40 feet. The first one takes you from 40' up to 20'. When you exit the first one, turn right and see the 2nd one that goes back down from 20' to 40'.

Keep going a little longer and you end up in 20' and finish the dive.

Notes

Diving The Coral Gardens at Vaka'eitu Vava'u Tonga

Location

North: 18°42.630'S / 174°06.144'W

Middle: 18°42.971'S / 174°06.231'W

South: 18°43.396'S / 174°06.336'W

General Info

The Coral Gardens at Vaka'eitu are in the gap between Vaka'eitu and Nuapapu island. The closest anchorage is the Vaka'eitu anchorage (Anchorage 16).

The Coral Gardens start at about 8' deep, on the eastern side, and slowly slope off toward about 50' deep, toward the west. The further south you go, the more the slope turns into a wall.

Access via dinghy, from Anchorage 16, is best done in very calm weather and close to high tide. In these conditions you can carefully motor across the reef from Anchorage 16 to the outside (west side) of the Coral Gardens. Even in very calm conditions, there is some swell breaking on the reef. Watch the swell, when you see a set of 3 waves, proceed smartly over the reef to the outside, in the calm between sets.

If you don't want to do this, the other options are to anchor your dinghy inside the reef, and swim over (ok for snorkeling, but not advised in dive gear), or take a boat around the long way to the outside of the reef.

The area between the North and Middle waypoint is vibrant with coral and fishes, and is generally an easier, shallow dive.

If you go farther south than the SW point of Vaka'eitu, you may encounter a strong current.

Dive Profile

Dive Profile courtesy of [Two If By Sea Sail & Dive Charters](#)

Notes

Diving Langito'o Island Reef Vava'u Tonga

Location

NW End: 18°43.668'S / 174°05.490'W

SE End: 18°43.835'S / 174°05.336'W

General Info

This reef area is on the south side of Langito'o Island, near the dive site commonly known as [The Pagodas](#). It is either a shallow dive or good snorkel.

This dive site is most easily reached by dinghies from Vaka'eitu (Anchorage 15,16) but could also be visited on a calm day from Ovalau (Anchorage 40) or Ovaka (Anchorage 38 and 39).

Note that the current has been reported to be sometimes quite strong in this area, so make sure you understand what it's doing before you leave your dinghy. On other days there is no current at all.

Dive Profile

The South East end of the reef is another coral mound, similar to The Pagodas. The reef then extends NW along to the NW waypoint. It is a gently-sloping wall from 15' down to about 45' deep. This would make a nice dive along this wall, and may be possible to dive when conditions are too rough for The Pagodas.

Notes

Diving The Pagodas Vava'u Tonga

Location

[Pagodas North](#): 18°43.990'S / 174°05.044 W

[Pagodas South](#): 18°44.230'S / 174°04.889 W

General Info

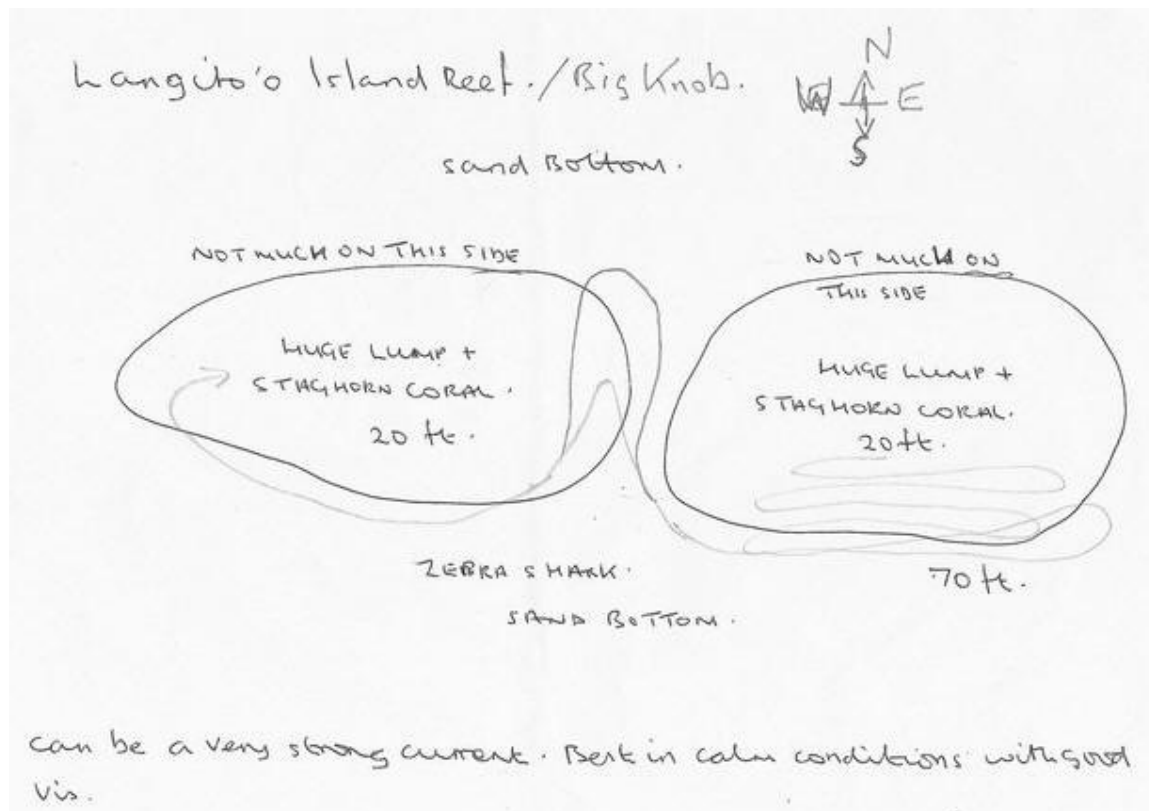
These two big coral mounds are out in the middle of the channel between Vaka'eitu (Anchorage 16) and Ovalau (Anchorage 40), and within reasonable dinghy distance, in settled weather, of those two anchorages and also Ovaka (Anchorage 38 and 39). In this area, the floor depth is 50-70', but the coral mounds rise to within 10 feet of the surface. They are easily seen in good light.

This dive can be made from dinghies during settled weather.

Note that the current has been reported to be sometimes quite strong in this area, so make sure you understand what it's doing before you leave your dinghy.

Dive Profile - Pagodas North

This dive profile is for the Northern Bommie. The position puts you right on the shallowest part at about 11 feet.



Dive Profile & Sketch courtesy of [Two If By Sea Sail & Dive Charters](#)

Figure out what the current is doing--have someone jump in the water and observe their drift. Anchor your dinghy carefully in a spot in the down-current direction, then plan on swimming up-stream while you are fresh, and drifting back when you are tired.

Though the sketch above shows the sand bottom at 70 ft, we never saw more than about 55 ft, and didn't see any 'zebra shark'.

Once you've got your dinghy secure in a spot of dead coral near the top of the bommie, descend in 20' and explore the southern face of the coral mound on your way from 20' to 50'. There is lots of beautiful coral and pretty fishies to explore, once on the coral/sand boundary, you will be about 50' deep. Head towards the other mound at 40-50', and then return toward your dinghy at about 30'. Toward the end of your dive, you can complete your safety stop over the coral at 15-20'.

On the day we went (winds had been less than 10 knots out of the east for days, mid tide on a rising tide), there was almost no current.

Dive Profile - Southern Bommie

After we dove the spot that Two If By Sea had given us the information on, we also checked out the southern bommie (which is visible, just barely, on Google Earth). It also runs mostly east and west and consists of 2-3 prominent mounds.

The anchor spot provided is on the eastern end of a large 2-mound area. Near a very-visible large yellow coral head. We anchored our dinghy on this eastern

edge, and circled the area counter-clockwise. This mound is much steeper-to than the Northern Bommie--more of a wall. On the north wall, we found a large Napoleon Wrasse and a school of large (1' diameter) spade fish.

The coral, though not as large and dramatic as that at the Northern Bommie, is very alive, and there is a lot of fish. The visibility also seemed a little better than on the Northern Bommie.

On the south side of the mound, we found some large overhangs, big snapper, and another school of large Spade Fish. Also a medium-sized turtle feeding on the coral at the bottom.

In a 45 minute dive, you can just circle the whole mound and arrive back at your dinghy near the big coral head, for your safety stop.

Notes

Diving The Pagodas Vava'u Tonga

Location

[Pagodas North](#): 18°43.990'S / 174°05.044 W

[Pagodas South](#): 18°44.230'S / 174°04.889 W

General Info

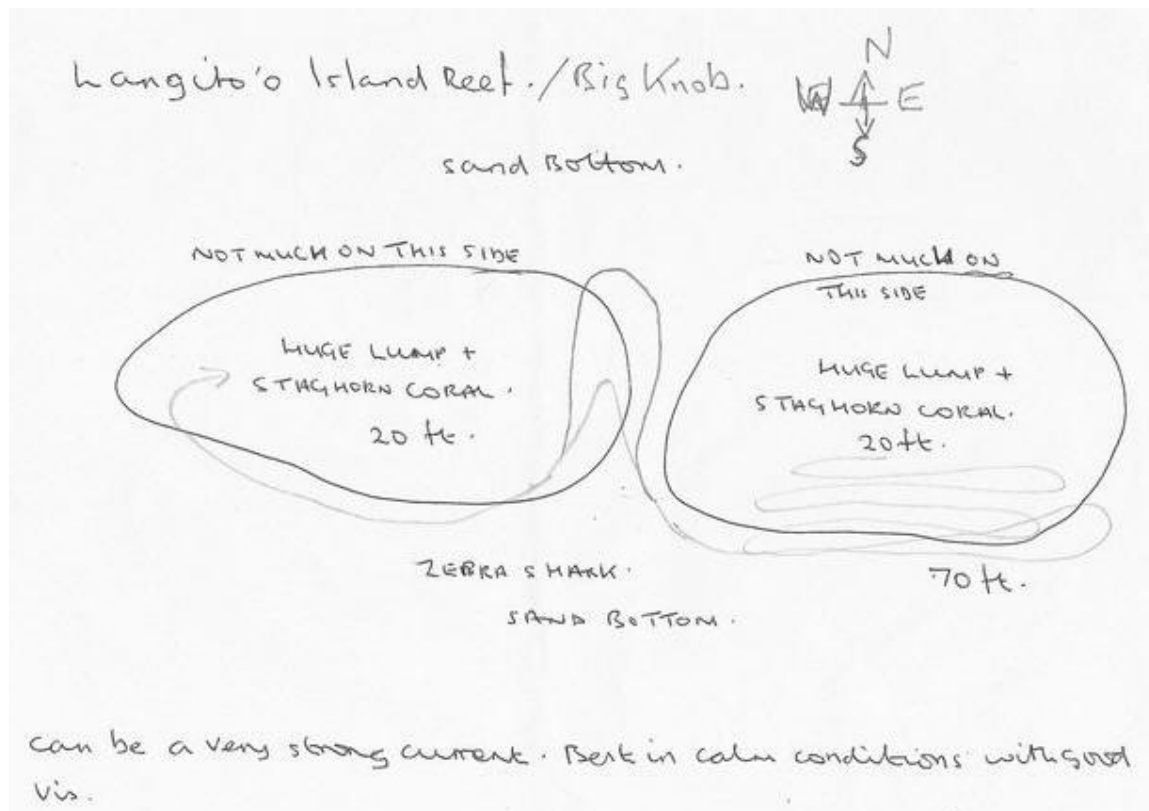
These two big coral mounds are out in the middle of the channel between Vaka'eitu (Anchorage 16) and Ovalau (Anchorage 40), and within reasonable dinghy distance, in settled weather, of those two anchorages and also Ovaka (Anchorage 38 and 39). In this area, the floor depth is 50-70', but the coral mounds rise to within 10 feet of the surface. They are easily seen in good light.

This dive can be made from dinghies during settled weather.

Note that the current has been reported to be sometimes quite strong in this area, so make sure you understand what it's doing before you leave your dinghy.

Dive Profile - Pagodas North

This dive profile is for the Northern Bommie. The position puts you right on the shallowest part at about 11 feet.



Dive Profile & Sketch courtesy of [Two If By Sea Sail & Dive Charters](#)

Figure out what the current is doing--have someone jump in the water and observe their drift. Anchor your dinghy carefully in a spot in the down-current direction, then plan on swimming up-stream while you are fresh, and drifting back when you are tired.

Though the sketch above shows the sand bottom at 70 ft, we never saw more than about 55 ft, and didn't see any 'zebra shark'.

Once you've got your dinghy secure in a spot of dead coral near the top of the bommie, descend in 20' and explore the southern face of the coral mound on your way from 20' to 50'. There is lots of beautiful coral and pretty fishies to explore, once on the coral/sand boundary, you will be about 50' deep. Head towards the other mound at 40-50', and then return toward your dinghy at about 30'. Toward the end of your dive, you can complete your safety stop over the coral at 15-20'.

On the day we went (winds had been less than 10 knots out of the east for days, mid tide on a rising tide), there was almost no current.

Dive Profile - Southern Bommie

After we dove the spot that Two If By Sea had given us the information on, we also checked out the southern bommie (which is visible, just barely, on Google Earth). It also runs mostly east and west and consists of 2-3 prominent mounds.

The anchor spot provided is on the eastern end of a large 2-mound area. Near a very-visible large yellow coral head. We anchored our dinghy on this eastern

edge, and circled the area counter-clockwise. This mound is much steeper-to than the Northern Bommie--more of a wall. On the north wall, we found a large Napoleon Wrasse and a school of large (1' diameter) spade fish.

The coral, though not as large and dramatic as that at the Northern Bommie, is very alive, and there is a lot of fish. The visibility also seemed a little better than on the Northern Bommie.

On the south side of the mound, we found some large overhangs, big snapper, and another school of large Spade Fish. Also a medium-sized turtle feeding on the coral at the bottom.

In a 45 minute dive, you can just circle the whole mound and arrive back at your dinghy near the big coral head, for your safety stop.

Notes

Diving The Pagodas Vava'u Tonga

Location

[Pagodas North](#): 18°43.990'S / 174°05.044 W

[Pagodas South](#): 18°44.230'S / 174°04.889 W

General Info

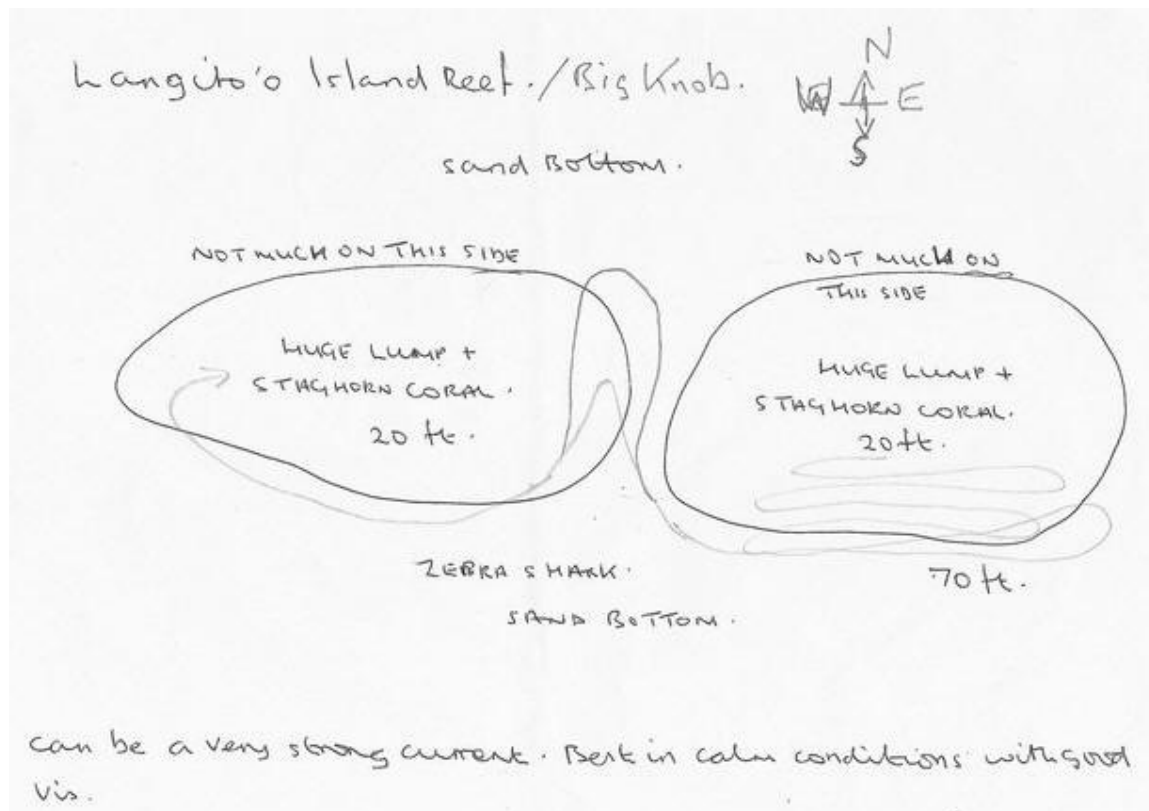
These two big coral mounds are out in the middle of the channel between Vaka'eitu (Anchorage 16) and Ovalau (Anchorage 40), and within reasonable dinghy distance, in settled weather, of those two anchorages and also Ovaka (Anchorage 38 and 39). In this area, the floor depth is 50-70', but the coral mounds rise to within 10 feet of the surface. They are easily seen in good light.

This dive can be made from dinghies during settled weather.

Note that the current has been reported to be sometimes quite strong in this area, so make sure you understand what it's doing before you leave your dinghy.

Dive Profile - Pagodas North

This dive profile is for the Northern Bommie. The position puts you right on the shallowest part at about 11 feet.



Dive Profile & Sketch courtesy of [Two If By Sea Sail & Dive Charters](#)

Figure out what the current is doing--have someone jump in the water and observe their drift. Anchor your dinghy carefully in a spot in the down-current direction, then plan on swimming up-stream while you are fresh, and drifting back when you are tired.

Though the sketch above shows the sand bottom at 70 ft, we never saw more than about 55 ft, and didn't see any 'zebra shark'.

Once you've got your dinghy secure in a spot of dead coral near the top of the bommie, descend in 20' and explore the southern face of the coral mound on your way from 20' to 50'. There is lots of beautiful coral and pretty fishies to explore, once on the coral/sand boundary, you will be about 50' deep. Head towards the other mound at 40-50', and then return toward your dinghy at about 30'. Toward the end of your dive, you can complete your safety stop over the coral at 15-20'.

On the day we went (winds had been less than 10 knots out of the east for days, mid tide on a rising tide), there was almost no current.

Dive Profile - Southern Bommie

After we dove the spot that Two If By Sea had given us the information on, we also checked out the southern bommie (which is visible, just barely, on Google Earth). It also runs mostly east and west and consists of 2-3 prominent mounds.

The anchor spot provided is on the eastern end of a large 2-mound area. Near a very-visible large yellow coral head. We anchored our dinghy on this eastern

edge, and circled the area counter-clockwise. This mound is much steeper-to than the Northern Bommie--more of a wall. On the north wall, we found a large Napoleon Wrasse and a school of large (1' diameter) spade fish.

The coral, though not as large and dramatic as that at the Northern Bommie, is very alive, and there is a lot of fish. The visibility also seemed a little better than on the Northern Bommie.

On the south side of the mound, we found some large overhangs, big snapper, and another school of large Spade Fish. Also a medium-sized turtle feeding on the coral at the bottom.

In a 45 minute dive, you can just circle the whole mound and arrive back at your dinghy near the big coral head, for your safety stop.

Notes

Diving Ovaka's Coral Canyons Vava'u Tonga

Location

18°44.698'S / 174°06.626'W

On a beach-lined cove on the north shore of Ovaka.

General Info

This dive is accessible by dinghy in settled weather from Vaka'eitu (#16), Ovalu (#40) and Ovaka (#38, 39). There is a very narrow cut in the reef that only a dinghy or small dive boat can navigate, to get in to the anchorage spot--a protected shallow water spot just off a beautiful beach. This makes a good lunch stop.

This area has been declared a 'no fishing' zone by the Ovaka village.

Dive Profile

Enter the water from the boat in about 3' of water. With your dive gear on, but fins in hand, wade out until the water is deep enough to swim and put your fins on and do your final checks. The first 5-10 minutes of the dive, you are essentially snorkeling.

Do not take the channel that you came in with the dinghy, but the next one to the south--a very narrow spot in the rock with a swim-through at about 10' deep. Proceed out and left (north and west), and wend your way over and through the shallower coral and in to deeper water.

The visibility isn't great in close, but as you get to deeper water, it gets better. Most of this dive is in and around the coral formations in 25'-40'. It makes a nice relaxed second dive.

Notes

Diving The Nursery Vava'u Tonga

Location

18°44.668'S / 174°02.544'W

NW tip of Euakafa Island (near Anchorage #32)

General Info

This is a good spot to either snorkel or dive. You can anchor the big boat on the narrow shelf on the north side of the island, or on the sand mound SW of the bommie, at approx 18° 45.44'S / 174° 2.62'W.



Dive Profile

This dive is off a 'bommie' (coral mound) that is in a channel between two reef areas. The current can be running quite strong in the channel and on the top of the coral mound. It generally runs north on a falling tide, and south on a rising tide. The best area for diving is on the north side of the mound. So it is best to dive this spot either at slack tide, or on a falling tide, when the current is running north. With a northbound current, on the north side of the bommie, once you are on the bottom, you are protected by the reef from most of the current.

This spot is called The Nursery because of the huge number of small fish. There are hundreds of all shapes, sizes, colors. Nice live coral in this area and some huge coral structures.

Notes

Diving Blue Coral Vava'u Tonga

Location



18°45.927'S / 174°02.337'W

West side of Euakafa Island (near Anchorage #32)

General Info

This is a good spot to either snorkel or dive. You can anchor the big boat on the narrow shelf on the north side of the island, or on the sand mound SW of the bommie, at approx 18° 45.44'S / 174° 2.62'W.

Dive Profile

Anchor the dinghy at the waypoint in about 20' in a white sand area. This spot is tucked in along the island enough to be out of southerly swell, and out of any current which may be running in the cut. Descend and head west down the slope to about 50'. Turn north and follow the contour around a reefy point, near the sand bottom. At this depth, the coral isn't that interesting, but there are lots of fish to see. Continue on around the point and along the reef. After about 15 minutes, turn around, and finish your dive around 15-25', where the coral and fish are incredibly prolific.

Those wishing for a deeper dive, can instead head south along the reef and explore what looks like a wall. (but what we saw of it was somewhat dead).

Diving Little Knob Vava'u Tonga

Location

18-43.504'S / 174-00.148'W

General Info

This is another coral mound similar to the [Langito'o Island Bommies](#). Access by dinghy is possible from several anchorages, in the Tapanā and Taunga area (Anchorages 11, 12, 21, or 24 are closest).

Dive Profile

The following are comments from Jon Hacking from s/v Ocelot, who documented their dive on this coral mound in 2004.

"We started down in 30' (9m). We continued east until the bommie dropped off and then circled counter-clockwise around the bommie at 60' (18m). Chris had the camera the whole time, which allowed me to take my time and see all that was available. As this was our first dive in Tonga, we saw lots of new fish and corals, including our first giant clam. These are not as big as those we saw

on the Great Barrier Reef in 2000, but it was a sign of things to come. Unlike French Polynesia, we saw no sharks. Most of the fish were smaller, but there were lots of them. As our air ran low, we rose to the middle of the bommie and found a nice coral head to examine as we took our safety stop."

[s/v Ocelot's Tonga Diving Information Page](#)

Notes

Snorkelling and Dive Sites near Lape Island, Vava'u, Tonga

Site Names and GPS Positions

By Paul Major, s/v Bella Via

The Corel Garden – 18° 42.798' S, 174° 06.160' W

The Coral Wonder – 18° 43.765' S, 174° 05.397' W

The Coral Canyons – 18° 43.342' S, 174° 06.305' W

Lua Tofua'a (Whale Reef) – 18° 43.983' S, 174° 05.067' W

The Corel Garden – 18° 42.798' S, 174° 06.160' W

This is the reef that extends from the shores of Nuapapu to the north and Vaka Eitu to the south. It is the western side (seaward side) of this reef that is most interesting and colourful. The eastern side is shallow and not very interesting. The challenge is to get to the western side from the anchorages located at Lape Island and Vaka Eitu. One strategy is to dinghy to the northern tip of Vaka Eitu where there is a sandy beach for landing the dinghy. One must still walk or swim approximately 20 metres and through some surf, across the reef, depending on the state of the tide, to get to the western side of the reef. It is possible to cross the reef in a dinghy with the outboard motor fully down, 2 hours either side of high tide. When attempting this, one must time your crossing of the reef during a lull in the waves that usually break on the reef.

The Coral Wonder – 18° 43.765' S, 174° 05.397' W

This reef extends from the eastern edge of Vaka Eitu to Langito'o Island (aka Langitau Island). It is the southern side of this reef that is most interesting. This area is much easier to get to and is, in the opinion of many, as good a snorkel if not better than the Coral Garden. Access the area by dinghying around Langito'o from the anchorages at Vaka Eitu or Lape Island. Like the Coral Garden it is possible to cross this reef 2 hours either side of high tide with a dinghy outboard motor down. From Lape Island, cross the reef hugging close to Langito'o Island, then look to the southwest for a small bay in the coral. Use the narrow entrance to this bay in the reef to get through the breakers that occur across the reef when a westerly swell is running. PLEASE take extreme caution to anchor in one of the bare locations so that none of the coral is damaged in this very small area. The best snorkelling in this area is to the south of the reef bay previously mentioned. This area features a few giant sheets of flat table top like coral, many varieties of soft coral, feather coral and "Spotty", a large, "Many Spotted Sweetlip". Spotty is a yellow fish with black polka-dots. He lives just around the southern point of the reef as you start to head east.

The Coral Canyons – 18° 43.342' S, 174° 06.305' W

These coral formations extend the length of the shallow bight that forms the western shore of Vaka Eitu. From the steep rocky shoreline there are fingers of coral which extend from the shore to seaward then drop steeply from the surface to depths of 20 meters. The water is always clearer here than any of the other nearby snorkelling sites. The clear water, the canyons of coral and the steep drop off make for a panoramic view not to be missed. The steep coral face dropping to a depth of 20+ meters makes this a good SCUBA dive as well as a good snorkel site. Access this area by crossing the Coral Garden by dinghy up to 2 hours before high tide. Time your snorkel so that you can get back across the Coral Garden within 2 hours after high tide. This leaves a 4 hour

window for the snorkel. The alternative is a long, often rough, dinghy ride all the way around the southern and eastern sides of Vaka Eitu and Langito'o Island (aka Langitau I.) to get back to the anchorages in Vaka Eitu or Lape Island.

Lua Tofua'a (Whale Reef) – 18° 43.983' S, 174° 05.067' W

This "lua" (under water reef), located 0.2 nm SSE of Longito'o Island (aka Langitau I) is easily reached by dinghy from the Lape or Vaka Eitu anchorages at any state of the tide. Anchor the dinghy in approximately 3 to 8 metres of water on any of the bare spots located in the centre of the reef. The depth over the reef ranges from 2 to 8 metres, the depth around the reef ranges from 14 to 25 meters, making this another interesting Scuba dive site. This site offers a few large coral formations and the occasional big fish - amberjack, rock cod and maori wrasse have been seen here.

[Download a Google Earth KML File for these sites](#) (Right click link and 'save as' to your desktop)

[Download an OpenCPN gpx File for these sites](#)

Dive Sites in the Ha'apai Group of Tonga

We didn't spend nearly as much time diving in the Ha'apai as we did Vava'u. But below are the sites we know about from our own dive experiences, and from others (friends and internet sources). (and as of May 2012, we are still compiling our Ha'apai info)

<Map Coming Soon for Ha'apai>

Each site is linked to a page with detailed info about access, dive profile, and pictures.

Site Name	Latitude	Longitude	Description
Atlantis	Fins n Flukes	Fins n Flukes	A nice detached coral reef in 10-80 feet, west of Lifuka. Diveable in fairly strong east winds.
Mariner's Patch	Fins n Flukes	Fins n Flukes	High profile coral area. Lots of fish life, nudibranchs, and an anchor from the Port au Prince. Near Lifuka.

Surfing/Kiteboarding



Muomua Lefties

As you probably guessed, this is the lefthand break on the island. again with the right swell its exceptionally good. Although only surf-able at high tide or you'll be high and dry

M&M's

Rarely breaks but when it does its the best ride in the world. Perfect, hollow right handers that go on and on around that point.

Euakafa

Great kite boarding location

Nuku Island

Prime area for kiting. Has a nice beach on the point that makes setup really nice and is a great picnic beach. Just steer clear of the shallow areas marked in red and you'll be fine

Battleships

From a distance, the island looks like a battleship, hence the name. Its a reef break, only accessible by boat. Its a rolling left hand break, any size is do-able however with a 2.5-3 metre swell, it really pumps, barrels being common.

Keitahi

One of two breaks you can drive too. average waves, never gets to great but still better then nothing.

Reece's Point

only breaks in the months of December to February. Needs a Strong yet rare west swell of atleast 2 metre to break consistently and good. its a great long boarding wave, yet shallow in places, only surf-able at a high tide.

Rarely Breaks

Only breaks with a really large west swell. Waves break parrallel to the beach so you get really long rides. can be ridden right or left with right giving a longer ride. Rarely Breaks usually goes off when Reece's Point is too big to surf..

Talihau Beach

Prime kiteboarding location with constant trade winds always blowing about 15-20 knots