

CLEETHORPES & DISTRICT

An extraordinary voyage of discovery from Pleasure Island to a wondrous

Diving into a whole

• Ayesha explores a beautiful coral. Submitted picture



SHE may be in over her head, but for one Meggie, becoming a diving instructor was the ultimate way to escape stress. Speaking from Thailand, she told Cleethorpes reporter CONRAD EMMETT about life away from the "rat race".

CLEETHORPES-BORN Ayesha Cantrell worked in a variety of jobs before deciding to go for something different – very different.

"I lived close to the Wellow Hotel until I was about 16, when I moved to Grimsby, as my mother had purchased a newsagents," said the 34-year-old.

"I worked in marketing for Pleasure Island when it first opened, and from there I moved to Flamingo Land, North Yorkshire.

"I then moved to Derby and started working for Bacardi.

"Over the next six years, I worked in the company's UK headquarters,

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CLEETHORPES & DISTRICT

underwater world and island paradise in stress-free Thailand

new way of life

in Southampton, and in South Africa and Australia."

But the former Signhills and Lindsey pupil began to dream of a great escape.

"I think everyone has that 'how do I get out of here' moment, but I was serious. I'd had a great time working for Bacardi and had some amazing experiences - but it was certainly time for a change.

"It quickly became apparent that another job in the same industry or field was not what I was looking for either; same hours, same stress.

"I needed to get out of the rat race. It was time to do something totally different... but could I survive without all the trappings of the corporate world?"

"I had taken my first scuba courses in South Africa, some years before, and loved it. I still dived at weekends and it was a great way to relax.

"I was sharing my hunt for a different job and lifestyle with one of the instructors at my local dive centre, and he suggested that I become an instructor.

"It was such an obvious idea - to everyone else - and one that took root very quickly.

"I'd travelled in Thailand before and loved it, so it seemed the perfect choice of place to train. Great weather, warm, clear, calm waters and a great lifestyle.

"Within weeks, I had handed in my notice and booked a flight to Thailand. What did I have to lose?"

There are still a lot of wrecks just waiting to be found - it's a very exciting time to be diving here.

"It's fair to say that most of my work colleagues thought I had finally gone completely mad or that it was some kind of elaborate joke.

"My boss believed I was actually going to work for a competitor, hence the reason I'd made up such a bizarre story for why I was leaving!

"I completed my training on Koh Tao, a small island off the east coast of Thailand and fell in love with the place. It was a difficult choice to leave, but I wanted to travel and work elsewhere - after all, this little corner of paradise wasn't going anywhere.

"I worked and travelled for the next year, surviving the tsunami in Koh Phi Phi, working in Honduras and Egypt and visiting Mexico, Mozambique, South Africa and India, before returning to Koh Tao again.

"I worked on Koh Tao for over 18 months, teaching people to dive and making souvenir underwater videos.

"This is where my passion for underwater photography started.

"I'd always loved shipwrecks and, when I returned to Koh Tao, to find that a Second World War US submarine had been rediscovered, along with other world class wrecks, I was intrigued.

"All these wrecks lie in deep water outside of the depths observed in recreational diving.

"To dive these wrecks special training must be undertaken. I had

completed the first part of this demanding training in Mexico and I now had a reason to finish it.

"I was totally hooked. The wrecks are amazing and, because they were newly-discovered, it meant that each dive was part of the process of identification and learning more about the vessels' demise.

"I got in touch with a good friend of mine, whom I had met doing my instructor course, and suggested he came over.

"Wilco Both, a Dutch ex-marine, had been working as a dive instructor in Egypt since we completed our instructor exams and he came over for a holiday.

"New wrecks were being discovered regularly and we became a fixture on the boat and a couple, working through the instructor courses to be able to teach this type of diving, too.

"We dived the submarine, a Second World War prisoner of war ship, tankers, cargo and munitions carriers, drill ships and many more besides.

"We have found ancient pottery and had many amazing and exciting dives. There are still a lot of wrecks just waiting to be found - it's a very exciting time to be diving here.

"Having completed all our training, we got an amazing opportunity to go and work in the Maldives for a year, and we took it.

"We had some amazing diving, met some awesome people and, due to the remoteness, we managed to save money.

"We returned to Koh Tao to set up our own dive businesses.

"We now teach recreational and technical deep diving and some professional level courses.

"For the technical diving, we joined forces with one of the largest dive centres in south east Asia.

"It allows us to provide other divers with the opportunity to take the training and visit these stunning wrecks, too.

"I love photography, and I have had a few articles published.

"Teaching people to dive is very rewarding. It's always amazing to see the difference in people over the three and a bit days it takes to teach the first course.

"I can honestly say that I have never regretted my decision. I own one pair of flip-flops, but most of the time I'm barefoot!

"I go to work in a bikini, shorts and T-shirt and I am a happier, more relaxed person than I was before.

"Transport is a battered scooter with an attitude problem and an aversion to rain.

"We live in a Thai-style wooden house at the top of a hill. It has a huge balcony and a beautiful view of the bay, and the jungle is just behind us.

"We have no address as such, directions to our house go something like 'go past the laundry, follow the bad road up the hill, past the



● **Ayesha and Wilco take time out on the beach.**

big puddle and, when you see the goats, turn right. Follow the sandy track until you see the hill, then first gear to the max, take no prisoners and do not stop and you'll find three houses at the top - we are in the middle.'

"And yes, we can get pizza delivered!"

"We have three kittens, a dog that adopted us, three lizards in the bathroom that eat mosquitoes, a bat in the eaves and the occasional snake.

"We have that many insects and

frogs around us that the chorus in the evening is amazing, so much so that upon our recent visit to Cleethorpes I found the quietness at night so unsettling it was difficult to sleep.

"Life is very different here. I can eat a good meal for around £1, I can't remember what rush hour is and the island's idea of a deadline is getting to the pub before happy hour ends."

Find out more

Visit www.ThailandTechnicalDiving.com or go to www.LearnToDiveOnKohTao.com

IN BRIEF

Bingo bonanza

GET your eyes down and look in for a special festive bingo bonanza.

The Christmas prize bingo party night at Wendover Hall, Humberston, will kick-off from 7.30pm tomorrow.

Playing costs just £1 per book of 10 games.

● **For more information, call (01472) 593025.**

Art exhibition

THERE is no need to get in a knot over your Christmas shopping this year.

Instead, get along to an exhibition and sale of paintings, needlework and patchwork by local artists.

The exhibition will be held at Cleethorpes Library, between 10am-4pm today and tomorrow.

Entry is free of charge.

● **For more information, call (01472) 828888.**

Christmas fare

THE Coeliacs Support Group is hosting a gluten-free Christmas dinner this month.

Fizz Champagne Bar, on Cleethorpes High Street, has created a special festive menu for the lunch on Sunday, December 14, at 12.30pm.

● **Contact (01472) 603696 to book a place.**

Make this Christmas a magical experience for your child and send them a letter from Santa.



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Simply complete the form below, please print clearly. If you have more than one child that you would like to send a letter to, then simply fill in their details. Send a cheque or postal order for £3.50 per letter made payable to Grimsby and Scunthorpe Media Group Ltd (Do not post cash). Please write your details on the back of the cheque.

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