



Ron Akeson

1957-2014

Mission Well Done

Text and photos
courtesy of Barb Roy

I don't think a week ever went by where I didn't hear Ron tell someone at his Bellingham dive store, "My motto in life follows the saying: growing old is mandatory, but growing up is optional." If you ever had the pleasure of knowing or meeting Ron Akeson, you probably understood how he viewed life, because he truly believed in trying to squeeze in every little bit of living into each and every day!

On 23 April 2014, the northwestern part of the United States and Canada lost a true pioneer of diving as wreck explorer, Ron Akeson, passed away due to complications after a dive accident. The reason is still under investigation, but family and close friends surrounded him until the end. A cascade of grief seemed to grip the local dive community in a domino effect as more and more heard of his passing. Multitudes continue to call in, shocked to hear their mentor, past dive instructor and friend would no longer be around. Ron was also a contributing writer for *X-RAY MAG* for many years, specializing in technical diving articles.

As the owner of Adventures Down Under, a retail travel and full service dive store in Bellingham, Washington, Ron's reputation for his dive training, vast knowledge, technical dive expeditions and great stories preceded him everywhere he went. He loved diving like no other activity. When he wasn't able to go diving, he enjoyed hiking in the mountains, kayaking, bird watching, filming wildlife and teaching others to dive.

History

I first met Ron in Alaska when I was running a dive store and local dive travel business. He wanted to write a story about diving in Alaska for

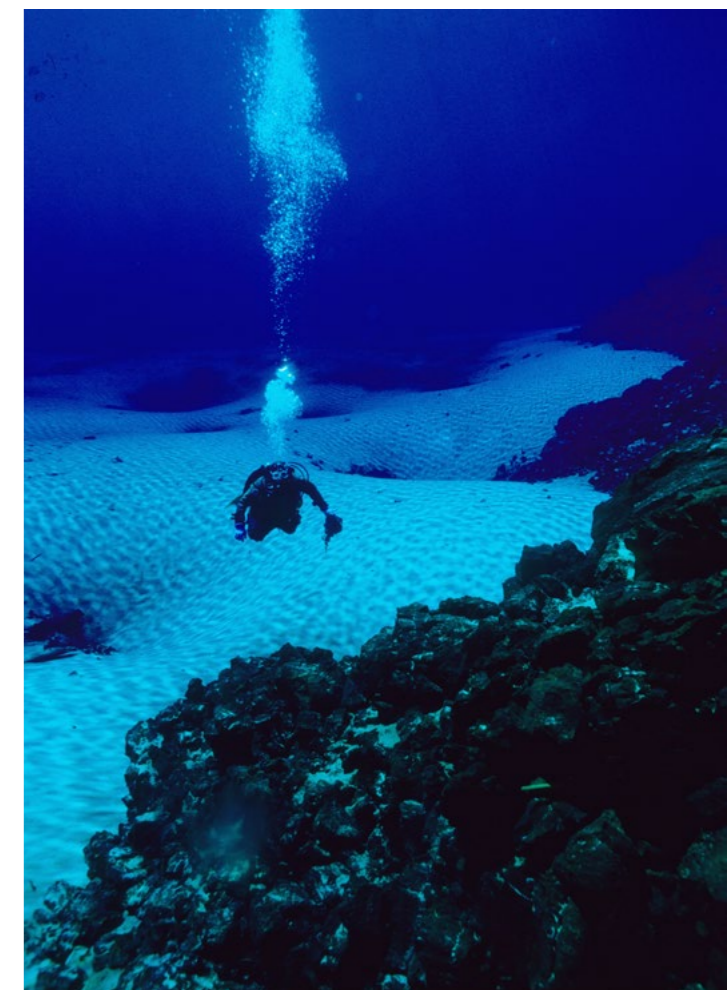


Skin Diver Magazine so I took him to my favorite sites. That was around 1985. We quickly became good friends, and I began my underwater photography lessons with a Nikonos III camera in exchange for introducing him to the critters of Alaska above and below the water.

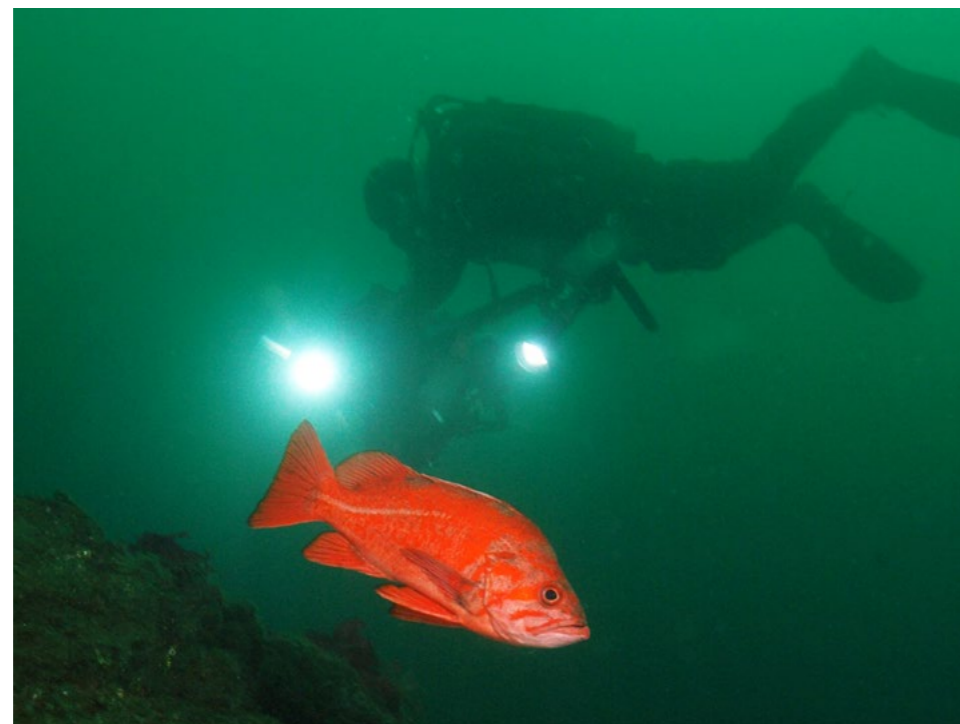
That was a long time ago. Since then Ron has provided my technical diving instruction, been a strict proofreading editor for all of my stories and has passed on to me a portion of his massive marine critter identification knowledge (he is also a marine biologist). We have enjoyed countless discussions of shipwrecks and future dive sites we wanted to explore over gallons of coffee and green tea.

Wreck diving

I believe wreck diving was his greatest passion though. As a founding member and president of the Maritime Documentation Society (MDS), Ron was always



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: Ron Akeson at propellor blade of HIJMS *Nagato*, Bikini Atoll; As a dive instructor, Ron often led dive trips to Port Hardy, British Columbia, Canada; Ron diving Clear Lake, Oregon, and with vermillion rockfish in Hood Canal, Washington State, USA





As a technical dive instructor, Ron was a favourite, as he shared not only a wealth of knowledge and advice but great stories too

was to dive in the world, he always replied: "Right here in the Pacific Northwest, hands down! We have so much color and diversity of life in our own backyard; you just have to get out and go see it."

Fond memories

When my husband, Wayne, could not dive with me, Ron usually filled in, anxious to have another chance to jump in with his engine block. The last dive Ron and I enjoyed together was this past March under the Deception Pass Bridge on Whidbey Island in Washington State, while on *Lu Jac's Quest*—the boat Ron always used for his San Juan Islands charters (in Washington State). It was a beautiful day and visibility underwater was great. The amount of life reminded me of why I dive cold water.

"Ron taught me how to dive Deception Pass," commented Phil Jensen, owner and operator of *Lu Jac's Quest* dive boat, "He taught me how to take a group of divers in there and choose the right slack current time for them to jump in. He always knew what day would be best too. He

lined up deep wreck expeditions and activities for the team. During their many journeys, Ron would always be seen lugging around his massive professional Gates video system with dual strobes that could turn night into day. He liked to refer to his housing as his engine block! I'm sure those who had to lift it out of the water would agree with this description. Personally, from carrying it a few times myself, it seemed more like a freight train engine! Nevertheless, from the film clips we viewed after dives, the footage was spectacular. He loved his team like family.

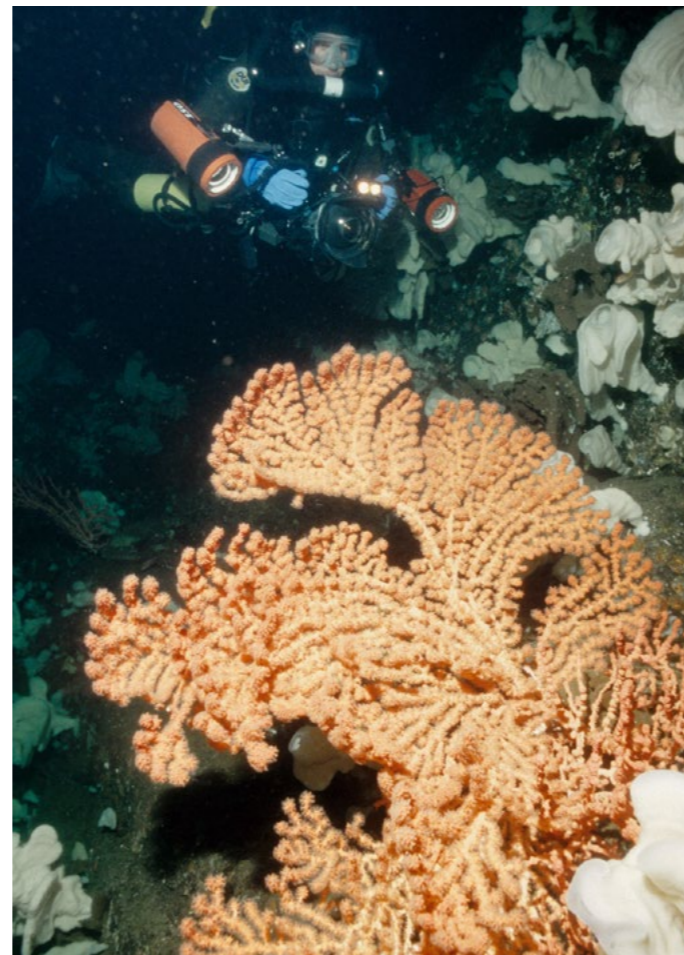
Ron did enjoy owning a dive store though, but those of us who knew him best liked to tease that he needed the store to support his wreck diving addiction. On several occasions Ron told me he never tired of introducing new divers to the fascination of what the underwater world had to offer, especially here in the northwest. And when asked where his favorite place



picked his technical dives that way too."

Rob Wilson, friend and MDS founding member felt the same way, "Ron always planned all of our tech dives. He would have everything all planned out—which wreck we would dive on, when to jump in and how long we would stay. We just showed up and followed his lead. He will be missed but we plan to continue doing what we all love to do—diving on and exploring wrecks. He would have wanted that."

Ron was also an active member of the Washington Scuba Alliance (WSA), serving as their president then vice president for many years. For over five years he served on the board of directors for the Dive Industry



Ron helping to clean the HMCS *Annapolis* before its sinking as an artificial reef (left) and with gorgonian sea fan at Agamemnon Wall (above), British Columbia, Canada

Ron Akeson

Association of British Columbia as a U.S. representative. He was also actively involved with the Marine Resource Committee (MRC) in Whatcom County and worked with his local Whatcom County Dive Rescue Team. The list goes on...

Not only does Ron leave behind countless friends, students and business associates in the dive community but also a sister, Jeannette, who resides in southern California; his four stepchildren, including Tallen Patrick, who many divers have met working by his side in the store for over five years; and nine grandchildren.

With each passing day, I am realizing just how often Ron and I talked on the phone, almost daily.

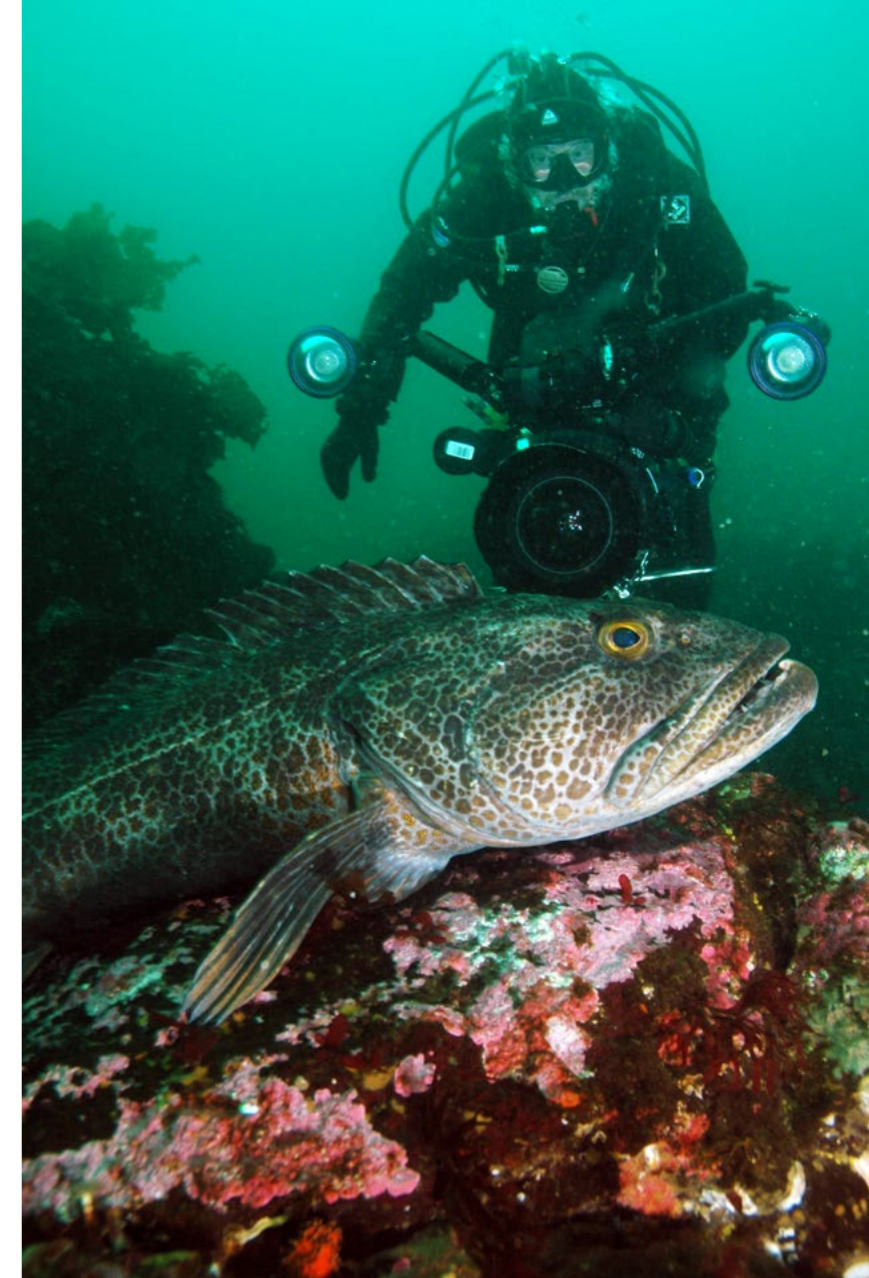
He touched so many lives around the world with his dive stories, photography, wisdom, advice and friendly attitude.

I would like to close this story about him with what I feel is an appropriate quote from Abraham Lincoln: "It's not the years in your life that count; it's the life in your years!"

Memorial

A Celebration of Life was held for Ron Akeson on Sunday, 22 June 2014, at the Squalicum Yacht Club in Bellingham, Washington.

I have decided to assist Tallen Patrick in continuing her father's legacy in helping her open a new dive business in the same location, 2821 Meridian Street in Bellingham, Washington State, beginning in July 2014. Watch for more details to come. □



Editor Barb Roy with Ron Akeson on dive trip in California; Ron with lingcod in Hood Canal, Washington State (top)