

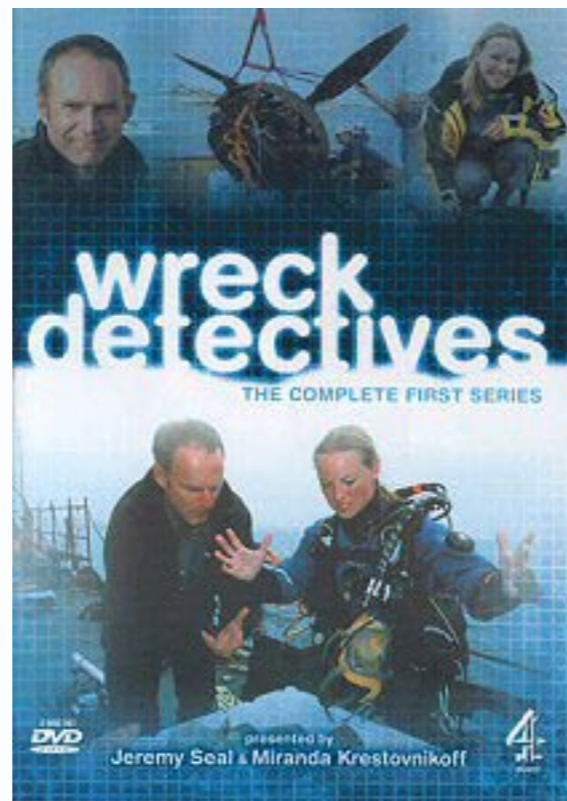


COMING
SOON TO A TELLY
NEAR YOU

How the world has come to see and know Miranda K. In an Aga mask, transmitting from the seabed

Being **Miranda K**

TV-Presenter, Wreck detective and producer



Miranda K and the team of the wreck detectives film series



Wreck detective Miranda Krestovnikoff recently completed another series of dive programmes for the BBC. The ambitious new series, *Coast*, is to be aired this autumn. We take a look behind the mask...

How did you get into diving?
I have always been a water baby – born an Aquarius, I was always jumping into water from an early age. I guess I was destined to be a diver; it was just a matter of time...

I was never really exposed to scuba diving as a child as we lived about as far away from the sea as you can get. I started to learn to dive in Bristol, after leaving University. I joined the University of Bristol Underwater Club, as it seemed a cheap and rather sociable way of learning to dive.

How right I was on both counts! I paid a small joining fee to cover weekly pool training,

and after just a couple of weeks sitting at the bottom of the university pool on Friday evenings and practicing a good bit of mouth to mouth resuscitation, I had a diving boyfriend! A good start and a great incentive to keep learning! As the club was a BSAC club, rather than a PADI one, the basic training was quite long and thorough – something which I really appreciate looking back at it. I had an excellent trainer who shouted a lot





Miranda gets help putting on her Aga mask before a shoot

but certainly couldn't have prepared me better for my first few dives. I never felt like so many people do, who dive for the first time abroad, that I had been thrown in the water with only the briefest of lessons. I spent the best part of two terms having weekly training

and only in the summer break did I get my first "open water" experience. I certainly felt more anticipation than nerves when going for my first dive.

I have managed to dig out my first diving log book which states that my very first dive – over 10 years ago now, was near Skomer in West Wales, was to a pathetic 6.2 metres and I stayed down only 12 minutes and saw nothing more than some kelp and

a lone spider crab. But I remember that dive so well. I remember the excitement of getting into the cold water in my new (and rather purple) semi dry suit—a bit of a change from a swimsuit in the university pool! I remember the joy of being underwater—being able to breathe without surfacing and witnessing a whole new world of fascinating sea life which I had only ever seen a glance of while rock pooling or snorkelling. Never did I realise that this experience would lead me onto my future job of presenting underwater.

And what was your first diving and presenting underwater job?

This was actually my very first presenting job as well. I was offered a series of 13 shows for Fox Television in the US, called World Gone Wild. This was covering animal=people stories around the work with a number of different presenters. Because I was a diver, 6 of the 13 stories I was to present were going to be based underwater. This was my first time using an Aga mask

and the first shoot was filming reef sharks (See later!). All in all, I had great fun but it was a bit like being thrown in at the deep end!!

How difficult is it to present underwater?

When presenting underwater, you have to wear an Aga mask—either a full face one, which has no method of equalising, or a half mask,

which has a nose dam. Apart from the difficulties of the mask and all the cables that tether you to the boat, there are many other things that limit you. You have to plan shorter dives due to the Aga masks using up a lot of air and my talking using up even more air! My depth is

Miranda K



also limited by the

length of the

umbilicals

especially if we're

not anchored up directly over the site hence the attraction

Miranda presents intriguing sea life under ice



Going to the Dive 2005 show in Birmingham (United Kingdom)?

Miranda Krestovnikoff will be talking about the recent filming of BBC's ambitious series *Coast on Dive 2005*, which is going to take place over the weekend of 29-30 October.

Miranda's presentation is going to be held in Concourse Suite 2 from 12.45 to 1.45





ABOVE: Miranda K discusses with a colleague the objects found at a wreck site

RIGHT: On location with some unpredictable screen players



protected wreck you are filming, try not to kick up silt and frustrate the cameraman, watch out for vicious moray eels, making sure they are filming your good side... they say that women are good at multi-tasking and I think they might be right!

Do you like using an aga mask?

Ah, the beloved Aga masks. These I also loathe because of the problems they bring. It's fantastic to be able to speak underwater and to communicate with topside, but after you talk, you need to breathe and this makes a noise so you

can't hear what others are saying. So, there's a timing problem—you have to speak, wait, listen, breathe, wait, listen, speak and so on. If things aren't going so well—substitute "shout" for "speak" and add a few expletives! Aga masks bleed air unless the seal is really tight around your face

and they only come in one size, so having a beard makes things very difficult—not a problem for me, but definitely one for some of our contributors!

of doing shallower dives. Agas do work without umbilicals but the sound quality is much less reliable. Then there's just the general stuff which goes on—it's a major "multi-task" to monitor your dive time, air, depth, etc. whilst trying to interview someone underwater, maintain neutral buoyancy, hold your breath while you listen to commands from the dive boat, try not to touch the

The full face ones are even harder to work with as there is no way of equalising apart from swallowing a lot, and then you need to remember to flush out all the CO₂ every minute or so.

What's the best wreck you've dived?

This has to be the Stirling Castle—a stunningly preserved wreck from 1703. It was sunk in the worst storm to hit Britain in recorded history. A third-rate man-of-war with over 70 cannon, she hit the Goodwin Sands off the coast of Ramsgate—swiftly becoming covered by the shifting sands and disappearing for 3 centuries. She emerged in 1979, almost pristine and I had the pleasure of diving her in 2002 with registered guardian, Bob Peacock. My dive log states that we saw intact gun ports, cannon, intact onion bottles, a bronze cauldron, 18ft anchor deck timbers, human bone, rudder.

It's a tough wreck to dive with only a small tidal window and visibility ranging from near zero to excellent. If you're lucky enough to get good vis—it's an incredible wreck.

And the most challenging?

Ever since the second series of Wreck Detectives was being researched by RDF (the independent company making the series for Channel Four), I had been told about this incredible wreck just off Padstow—a German U-Boat. A great wreck to dive, as it's so intact, great viz, only recently discovered and not yet even identified. Just one problem—it's at 60m. So, the question was asked: Was I up for it? I didn't mind doing another training course in order to see another wreck. I would also end up joining that elite group of divers—the



men in black suits—also known as the techies!

Nine days of classroom sessions and endless out of air drills and equipment checks later, I was an advanced Nitrox and IANTD Normoxic Trimix diver.

The training was well worth it—to dive on a practically virgin wreck in stunning visibility. Diving

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profile



in the UK really doesn't get any better than this!

What's been your best diving experience?

Diving with any marine mammal is a

wonderful experience. I've dived with dolphins, sharks, seals, and whales... but maybe the most magical of all for me was diving with manatees.

Sadly, this wasn't in the wild, as they are pretty rare and the waters they inhabit are often too murky to film in, but while filming for a wildlife TV series in Brazil, I was lucky enough to visit a manatee rescue centre where they are rehabilitated and kept in large tanks. When we arrived, it was explained that strictly no one was allowed to swim with them but the vet. No one, that was, apart from me.

We have stories about lured into these you've

all heard the sailors being the sea by sirens – well until heard them sing



to you, you'd have thought that the sailors were mad!

Once in the water, I was surrounded by the most beautiful symphony of sound from these slow and sluggish creatures. They wooed me with their songs... and then moved in for the touchy feely bit!

Wild animals tend to avoid humans, even when kept captive—so to have one come up and touch you of its own accord, was an incredible experience.

Manatees like to explore—this they do with their bristly lips, which are usually used for collecting vegetation and working it to the back of their mouths where their molars are. But they don't limit their exploration to vegetation—why not try human? First, a bristly massage against my arm, then another one on my leg, then all my hoses were explored and tugged.

Never before, and perhaps never again have I experienced such trust from a wild animal—a truly unforgettable experience in the water!

And your worst?

I have been pretty lucky not to have had any really bad diving experiences (touch wood), but

one memorable one, due to my lack of experience and having no Dive Supervisor in control is this:

We were filming reef sharks for World Gone Wild—the series I mentioned earlier where I first started my presenting career. We were in the Bahamas and although for anyone who's dived with reef sharks, it's not that scary, things didn't go according to plan from the start. The director was seasick just minutes from land, so we had



Miranda K in action

to turn around and drop her off and continue, undirected, to shoot the sequence.

I was a fairly inexperienced diver at that stage and this was my first time in the water wearing an Aga mask. I was a bit apprehensive about diving with sharks, but after a brief interview with the leader of the project and some "chumming" of the water to attract the starts of

A curious seal taps the back of Miranda's fin



Miranda K

our show, we dived in. Our aim was to create and film a feeding frenzy, but also to indicate that the sharks weren't really interested in eating us—just the fish!

Within minutes, we were surrounded by these huge fish coming at me from every direction—maybe it was a time when one is grateful for the lack of peripheral vision in a mask underwater!

"One's on your head, Miranda!" shouted Stuart.

I never saw it; instead, I felt another one on my arm—biting it! Thank goodness we were wearing chain mail (only on our arms, though!) I felt a huge pressure, but no pain, and all I had to show for it was a small hole in my suit.

The filming went well—I was trying hard to look cool, calm, and collected and it seemed to work...

After what seemed like an eternity on the dive—we ascended—this was when things started to go wrong. No one had been monitoring the dive. I guess, understandably, we were too caught up with the sharks and what they were going to eat next!

I started my ascent, to the sound of my computer bleeping a warning for 10 minutes of deco...

I checked my air—practically empty. With an Aga mask on, it's not easy to just rip it off and to swap tanks. Nothing to do but surface to the RIB, grab a mask, another cylinder, descend,



The wreck detectives kit up for another thrilling underwater production



profile



Quicktime video clip. Shark diving with Stuart Cove's. Size 4.9Mb



Quicktime video clip. Wreck detectives. Size 5.8Mb



Quicktime video clip. Presentation. Size 2.4Mb

and then carry on my deco (I DO NOT RECOMMEND THIS!!!).

So, that's what I did. Back down at my deco stop, I checked the air in my new tank. Nearly empty! They must have given me a used tank. B*****ds!

So, up again for a third tank. More expletives!

With a full tank, I finished my deco and surface, unharmed, and with no signs of decompression sickness. The dive was certainly not life threatening but for me it was an early warning to an inexperienced diver not to rely on others but to take charge yourself—especially with sharks around!



What plans have you got for future TV projects?

I am just in the process of filming a landmark BBC series called *COAST*, which airs in the UK from July 22nd. It features a diverse number of stories around the British coastline and I am following the natural history pieces. We have only had the chance to dive in a few locations, but when we have, it's been excellent. We filmed the charming and very inquisitive gray seals in the Farne Islands and also dived with mating cuttlefish off the South Coast at Selsey, near Bognor Regis. I have never been able to touch a cuttlefish before—they certainly had something else on their minds other than me!

What do you love so much about diving?

It's something you can't really explain to someone who doesn't dive.... utter weightlessness, therapy, relaxation, the sound of your own breathing, the gentle crackling of life underwater and just... utter calm. ■





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