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Diving community remembers Brian Pitkin

THE FUNERAL WAS HELD on 23 September of noted UK underwater photographer Brian Pitkin, who died on 31 August at the age of 75. He is best remembered as a leading light of the British Society of Underwater Photographers (BSoUP).

Born on 12 November, 1945, Pitkin's love of the natural world was evident throughout his life, from boyhood chasing of butterflies to a 41-year career with the Natural History Museum (NHM) studying insects until his retirement in 2006, though he continued to work on related projects.

He also developed an interest in wildflower recording, but it was scuba and underwater photography that played a huge part in his life for several decades.

An NHM fieldwork trip led to him snorkelling in Kenya in 1974, firing his fascination with the undersea world.

Back home he joined the Thornton Heath branch of the British Sub-Aqua Club and learnt to dive.

"A few years later, in 1979, he convinced me to join," says his widow Linda Pitkin, herself a well-known underwater photographer. "We went with the club on a Red Sea safari, from Eilat to Ras Mohammed, when Sharm as we now know it didn't exist.

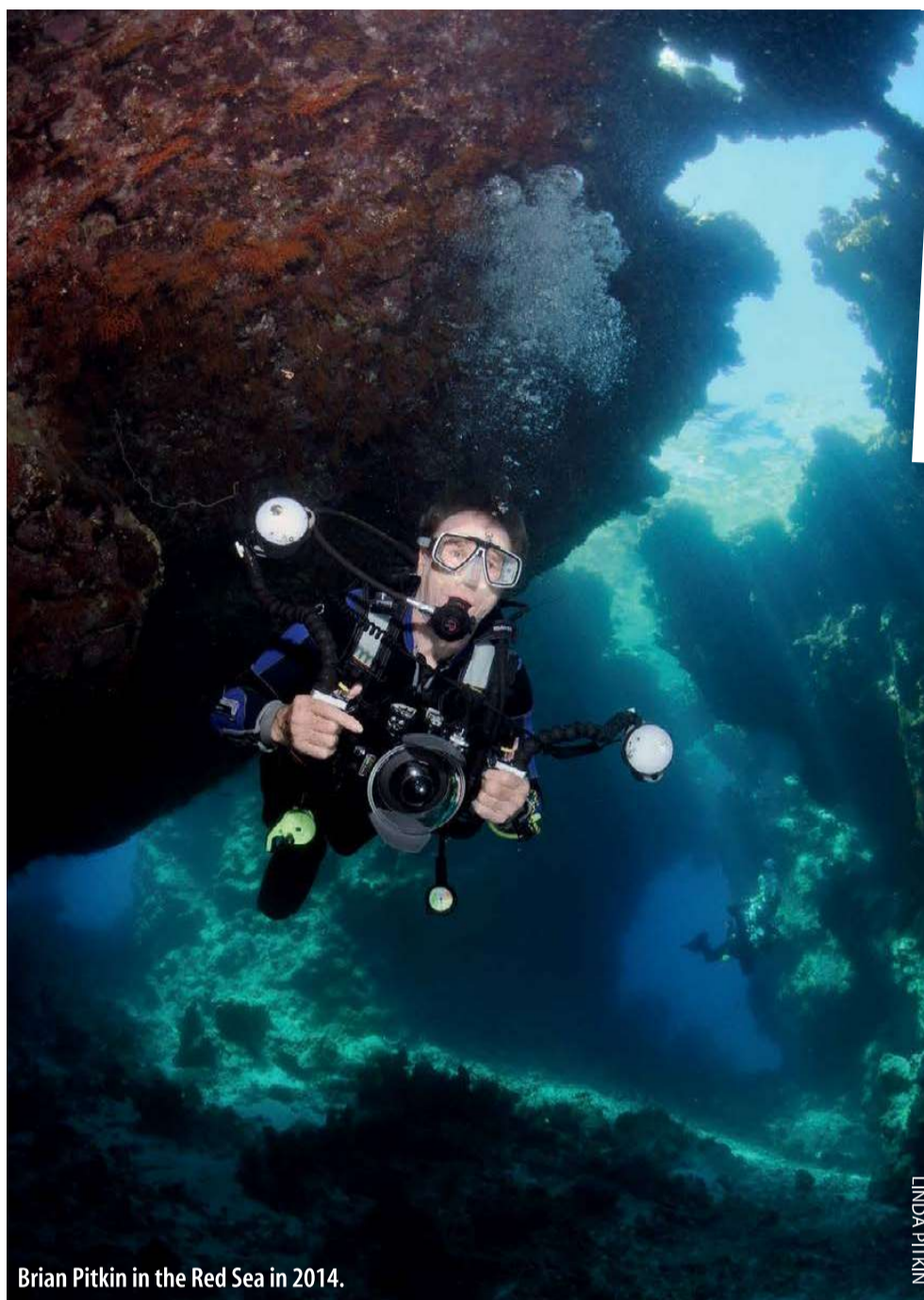
"This was quite an intrepid adventure in those days, sleeping on the beach and doing everything for ourselves without even a dive-guide".

Brian soon became diving officer and "virtually ran the small club", says Linda, "doing most of the training of new members as well as organising dives, mainly off the South Coast, and towing the club-boat".

In the early years that boat was a "somewhat inadequate Zodiac inflatable... One time the engine broke down and we were picked up by the RNLI, which happened to be running a public event just offshore that day and was delighted to have a real-life emergency to show off!"



Linda and Brian Pitkin on their golden wedding anniversary in July 2020 – the only selfie they ever took.



Brian Pitkin in the Red Sea in 2014.

Brian's diving skills and interest in marine biology saw him co-opted onto the NHM diving team, taking part in surveys mainly off Norfolk and usually in inclement winter weather.

Warmer forays included Red Sea surveys, when ships ran aground on Gulf of Aqaba and Suez coral reefs.

"All of our holidays and much of our spare time was devoted to diving, which we both enjoyed in chilly and often murky British seas, as well as in clear tropical seas around the world, visiting many far-flung and remote places, with the diversity of Indonesia one of our favourites," says Linda.

"We were lucky to have so many years of the most wonderful adventures together, and opportunities to get nose-to-nose with marine life, anything from a shrimp to a whale shark."

Underwater photography became a "passion

from the outset", she says of Brian, who she describes as a very accomplished photographer, winning awards, providing the photos for the Reg Vallentine book *Learn to Scuba Dive in a Weekend* in 1993, and the next year representing the UK at the CMAS World Championship in South Korea.

"His greatest achievements though were what he gave of himself," she says. The couple had joined BSoUP in 1980 and he was soon actively involved, producing the first issue of its *In Focus* newsletter in 1983 and continuing as editor for 14 years.

Following Peter Scoones as Chairman in 1987, he became President in 1998. He was "totally involved in everything BSoUP was doing, giving himself to the job with tireless energy, and often wearing several hats at once," says Linda.

"Brian was the welcoming, helpful, friendly face of the society.

"All along he was befriending and encouraging others, particularly newcomers, and he is remembered with love and appreciation for that."

He set up the society's Facebook group, and wrote many reports on the

photography competitions that he organised for many years, for **DIVER** and other magazines.

He was **DIVER's** photography consultant and a well-known figure at its Dive Shows, troubleshooting and compering the speaker presentations.

"It was always a pleasure to work with Brian," says **DIVER** publisher Nigel Eaton. "Without his expertise in both camera techniques and marine-life subjects, the many UK and international photo events run by **DIVER** could not have brought such a wealth of outstanding images to the diving world."

"I believe that Brian Pitkin was the most important member in the history of BSoUP," says leading underwater photographer Alex Mustard, one of the many to share fond memories of Pitkin. "He was that heartbeat that kept the blood pumping and BSoUP vital for decades.

"There was rarely an underwater photography event that Brian wasn't involved in making happen, and he created the incredible resource of the original BSoUP website, starting it at a time when there was almost no information about underwater photography on the entire Internet. And much, much more.

"Personally, I am most grateful for his friendly and welcoming attitude and for many, many members he was the icebreaker that drew us into the society. When I dipped my toes into our community, it was of course Brian who spotted the fresh face and said hello, found some kind words to say about my slides, and got me involved.

"And I will always be very proud that I had the chance to share underwater adventures with both Brian and Linda around the world.

"I am sure you're up there now, greasing O-rings and organising a heaven's first Splash-In! BSoUP will always miss you."

An online tribute has been set up at brianpitkin.muchloved.com ■

LINDA PITKIN

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