

# WELL AND TRULY TESTED



Say what you like about NIGEL WADE, nobody has ever described him as not having much to say for himself. And now he can maintain the flow under water – scroll on!

## COMMS DEVICE AQUASKETCH MINNO SCROLLING SLATE



### COMMUNICATION UNDER WATER

can be limited, to say the least. To get their messages across to each other, some divers deviate from the limited array of standard signals and end up gesticulating wildly, using signs that probably translate into some extraterrestrial language.

Misunderstandings are inevitable, and in some extreme cases could compromise safety.

What's needed is a foolproof method of communication, one that leaves the recipient in no doubt about the intended meaning.

Most divers understand the written word (assuming that they speak the same language), and words can be applied to lo-tec plastic slates with a standard pencil.

This works OK, but slates offer limited space, so for someone like me with a lot to say, it's the equivalent of a gag.

My regular buddies are likely to be holding their heads in their hands right now, because I've been sent a scrolling slate with 5ft of waterproof media on which to write – plus a pencil. It's the aquaSketch Minno, and I've been scribbling away to my heart's content.

### The Design

This device was the brainchild of an illustrator from New York who was looking for a way to draw images while diving.

He came up with a compact scrolling notebook claimed to combine the durability of a slate with the versatility of paper.

The writing surface is textured vellum made from a plasticised cotton material used for architectural drafting. The medium is waterproof and opaque. Rolled into a scroll, the vellum is mounted on twin rollers within the aquaSketch's polycarbonate body.

A flat backplate forms a solid writing surface. Made from a phosphorescent material that glows after exposure to an external light source, it creates a backlight through the opaque vellum. A plastic-coated solid graphite pencil is

integrated into the writing system using a short length of latex tubing, with a keeper in the base to keep it housed until needed.

The blank vellum roll is supplied in a 1.5m length. It's printable using standard inkjet printers with waterproof inks, so colour fish ID charts, dive-site maps, deco schedules and dive checklist can be permanently printed and loaded into the rollers.

The aquaSketch is 13.5 x 8.5 x 3cm deep with a writing area of 9 x 5.5cm and weighs in at 150g. It is mounted using a wide, adjustable, Velcro-fastening wrist-strap.

### In Use

The unit sat on my left arm, leaving my dominant hand to do the writing. The Velcro strap held everything securely in place and was easy to re-adjust at depth when my exposure suit had compressed, although I did feel it would have been better had the strap been elasticated to make this adjustment automatic, especially on ascent.

The graphite pencil provided dark text and drawings that were very easy to distinguish

against the light-coloured scroll. However, I found that the soft-grade pencil tip became blunt quite quickly when scribbling away on the vellum's textured surface.

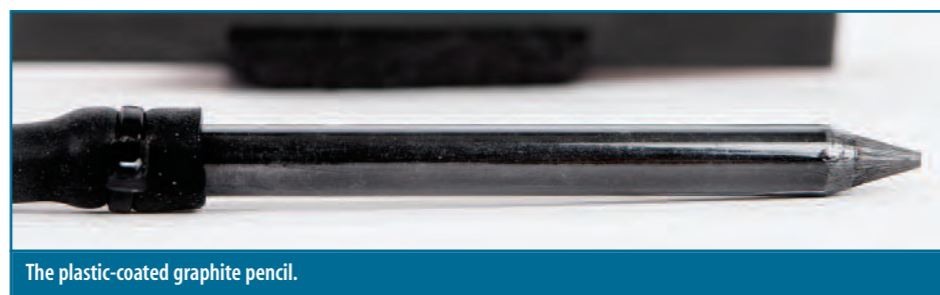
Once I'd filled a section with text and used it to bore my buddy to tears, it was a simple operation to twist the rollers to move along a section and add more.

With the length of the scroll this could be done so often that I could easily have left him without the will to live.

Or, of course, he could have given me the universally recognised (and, in my case, too often seen) V-sign and simply finned away.

Apart from writing or drawing to communicate, I found lots of other uses for the slate. I even used a permanent marker-pen to apply runtime and bail-out tables as back-up, in the unlikely event that my dive-computer failed.

I also recorded camera and strobe settings for easy reference, and I added a tabulated checklist of pre-dive equipment and safety checks. The phosphorescent backplate was a nice touch, making this scrolling slate suitable for dusk and night dives, where holding a torch while writing is an impossible task.



The plastic-coated graphite pencil.

## SPECS

PRICE ▶ £32

AVAILABLE COLOURS ▶ Black, green & white, pink & white

MATERIALS ▶ Polycarbonate body, plasticised cotton vellum

PAPER LENGTH ▶ 1.5m

SIZE ▶ 13.5 x 8.5 x 3cm

WEIGHT ▶ 150g

CONTACT ▶ [www.aquasketch.co.uk](http://www.aquasketch.co.uk)

DIVER GUIDE ★★★★★★☆☆

## Conclusion

When I first spied the aquaSketch Minno, I thought it was a gimmick, something to add to that ever growing pile of dive-kit that looks set to rock my world, only to be found after a few

dives to be about as useful as a chocolate teapot.

Instead, I've found this clever but simple device extremely useful. Its size and weight means that it takes up next to no room, and can easily be placed in a BC or drysuit pocket until needed.

Once out of the water, a plastic eraser or damp cloth will remove all the graphite text, leaving the vellum looking like new.

If, like me, you enjoy verbal communications and interaction with your dive-buddy, this little gem will be like removing the gag formed as soon as you put a

regulator in your mouth.

But do bear in mind that not all dive partners may see it the same way. ■



The aquaSketch Minno in use at the surface.

## MASK SCUBAPRO FRAMELESS GORILLA

IT SEEMS AGES SINCE I'VE HAD A NEW MASK FIX. This time I've got hold of a square-profile model, the Frameless Gorilla from the Scubapro stables, designed and built to suit the larger-faced divers among us.

I've been told that I've got a "big head" and I'm a bit of an animal under water, so this mask should fit the bill perfectly. I took it for a few UK dives to check it out while gratifying my addiction for testing masks.

### The Design

Built using Scubapro's original frameless platform but in a slightly bigger size, the Gorilla is aimed at larger divers. The square-profile single lens is big and wide and made from standard tempered glass, moulded directly into the silicon skirt without the use of a frame.

The push-button strap-buckles are fitted directly to the sides of the skirt, allowing for the mask to collapse and fold relatively flat for stowage in a BC or drysuit pocket.

A double-edged seal set around the inside of the skirt increases the mask-to-skin contact area, enabling a better watertight fit. The mask-strap has a square-profile headband that mimics the mask's shape.

The Gorilla I had on test was clear in colour, with a matte finish. It also comes in all-black.

### In Use

I didn't think I fell into the "larger-sized diver" category, yet I found that this model fitted me

perfectly – so much so that I may need to rethink my mask sizing from now on.

The nose-pocket is what I'd describe as "Goldilocks" – it isn't capacious and it's not tiny but just right, encompassing my oversized hooter snugly and causing no discomfort.

Strap-adjustment was a simple affair, with the push-to-release buckles fitted directly to the skirt easy to locate and operate, even with 5mm gloves. The angle of the buckle-mount is slightly positive and sent the strap naturally to the upper part of my head and away from my ears, with the rear headband perfectly situated on my cranium.

The single lens has a slightly green tint to it. I wouldn't normally have noticed this on a black-skirted mask, but the green glass was quite evident when viewed from the side through the translucent silicon, though you'd have to be eagle-eyed to notice any detrimental effects this might have when you look through it.

I hadn't dived with a clear-skirted mask for some time; I normally opt for black silicon to prevent stray light from interfering with my camera viewfinder.

The clear skirt on this Gorilla let in a lot of peripheral light and the underwater world instantly seemed a brighter place. It was as