

The Shark Route

FIONA AYERST IS ONE OF AFRICA'S BEST KNOWN AND EXPERIENCED SCUBA DIVERS AND UNDERWATER PHOTOGRAPHERS. SHE HAS DIVED WITH AND INTERACTED CLOSELY WITH SHARKS THROUGHOUT MUCH OF HER 25 YEARS OF DIVING. HERE FIONA SHARES HER THOUGHTS ON A NEW ROUTE THAT IS JUST UP HER ALLEY.



DIVING WITH SHARKS IS A CONTROVERSIAL ACTIVITY. You either love it or you hate it and there's little room for middle ground. The haters blame it for shark attacks and a perceived increase in fatal attacks and the lovers love the thrill and the interaction with one of the most powerful animals on earth. Love them or hate them we are all in awe of sharks.

I think it's amazing that we can interact on such close-up and personal terms with such a powerful apex predator. Recently, I was fortunate to go on a shark dive and then two days later on a game drive and whilst I can swim freely with sharks I wouldn't dream of alighting from the game vehicle anywhere near a pride of lions.

It is also worth considering the oft quoted philosopher Baba Dioum, who said: "In the end we will conserve only what we love. We will love only what we understand

Diving with sharks is a necessity for the conservation of same. Sure, there are many people making money out

of this activity. However if it is done in a regulated manner, responsibly and without greed it has the capacity to teach people about sharks. Almost every scientist I have spoken to has told me that no link exists between the shark diving industry and attacks.

I spoke to marine biologist Ryan Johnson of Oceans Research in Mossel Bay who said the following about this thorny issue:

"Through my involvement as a scientist in the shark industry I've frequently witnessed a side of shark diving that gains little attention; that is incredibly important to recognise and appreciate; a side that finally made me a complete supporter of responsible