

Basic Detail Report



00054325

Title

16mm film camera belonging to Ron Taylor

Date

1970s

Primary Maker

Valerie Taylor

Medium

Glass, plastic, metal

Dimensions

Overall: 90 × 203 × 173 mm

Name

Camera

History

Both Ron Taylor and Valerie Taylor (née Heighes) were pioneers in Australian skindiving. Ron took up the sport in 1952 and Valerie in 1956; they met as members of St George Spearfishing Club in Sydney and were married in 1963. At this period there was little awareness of marine conservation and both Ron and Valerie excelled at the sport of competitive spearfishing. Valerie won the Ladies National Spearfishing Championships three years in a row in the early 1960s, and Ron took out the World Spearfishing Championships in Tahiti in 1965. The Taylors' underwater interests grew to encompass scuba diving and underwater photography. Ron built the first of many underwater housings to take land cameras beneath the sea in 1953. When television came to Australia in 1956 he saw the potential for making underwater news stories and with the help of a friend, who lent him a Bell & Howell 16 mm movie camera, Ron built an acrylic housing for the camera and started selling underwater footage to television and to the cinema newsreel producer Movietone News. In 1962 Ron Taylor received his first award for underwater photography, for a news film called *Playing With Sharks*. In 1963 Ron and Valerie made their first underwater film *Shark Hunter* which was sold to enthusiastic television networks in Australia and the USA. The Taylors quickly gained a reputation for cutting-edge underwater photography and more awards followed, including top honours at the International Underwater Film Festival at Santa Monica, California, and an Underwater Society of America award, the NOGI statuette for Education and Sports, in 1966. Giving up competitive spearfishing in 1969, the Taylors devoted themselves full-time to shark research and underwater photography. They filmed many of the scenes in the American feature film *Blue Water, White Death*, playing two of the four main characters in the film. Shortly afterwards the Taylors spent nine months filming and directing a 39-episode television series

called Barrier Reef which they quickly followed up with another television series called Taylors' Inner Space, featuring their encounters with the marine life of the east coast of Australia and the Western Pacific. As their reputation grew, other underwater filming opportunities presented themselves: Jaws (1974) for Universal Pictures; Sharks for Timelife Television (1975); Orca (1976) for Dino De Laurentis; Peter Weir's The Last Wave (1977); The Blue Lagoon (1979) for Columbia Pictures, featuring Brooke Shields. The titles proliferated: Gallipoli (1981), The Year of Living Dangerously (1982), In the Realm of the Shark (1988), Return to the Blue Lagoon (1990) and The Island of Dr Moreau (1995) among others. The Taylors were also engaged in underwater research into shark behaviour. This led to the development of stainless steel chain mail diving suits (Operation Shark Bite, 1982, in which Valerie is bitten on the hand), and electronic shark deterrent equipment that allowed the Taylors to become the first divers ever to film Great White sharks underwater without a cage (Blue Wilderness, 1992 and Shark Pod, 1996). Passionate and vocal defenders of sharks and the marine environment, the Taylors' have been recognised for their work all over the globe. Valerie received the NOGI award for Arts in 1981. In 1986 she was appointed Rider of the Order of the Golden Ark by his Royal Highness Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands for her work in marine conservation, and in 1997 Valerie won the prestigious American Nature Photographer of the Year award for a picture of a whale shark swimming with a boy in Ningaloo Marine Park. In 1998 Ron and Valerie's book Blue Wilderness won the Gold Palm Award at the World Festival of Underwater Pictures in France and in October 2000 Ron and Valerie were inducted into the International Scuba Diving Hall of Fame on the Cayman Islands. In Australia, Ron and Valerie have received the Serventy Conservation Medal from the Australian Wildlife Preservation Society and the Lifetime of Conservation Medal from the Australian Geographic Society. In 2003 Ron became a Member of the Order of Australia, joined by Valerie in 2010 for their work in conserving marine animals and habitat.