



Read and choose the heading from 1-8 to the paragraphs A-G.

Taking the Plunge



A I met my Russian friend Anya on a diving holiday a few years ago, so on a recent trip to visit her, she suggested that we go ice diving in Lake Baikal in the south of Siberia. I leapt at the chance! After all, you don't get the chance to dive in the deepest and oldest freshwater lake in the world every day.

B After putting on our drysuits at the dive centre, we made our way to the stunning lakeside. The sheer size of the lake – it's 31,722 km – made it look more like a sea than a lake. Looking out over the lake with the towering mountains all around under a clear blue sky totally took my breath away.

C All the same, I realised I was a little nervous. I'm an experienced diver but I had never dived in such low temperatures before. The air temperature was about -20°C and I was very worried how cold the water would be! Anya, however, assured me that the water temperature would be much warmer at around 2°C and our drysuit would keep us warm enough. This didn't really make me feel any better. 2°C still sounded pretty cold to me!

D As we drove out onto the ice, our guide told us that Lake Baikal is 25 million years old, possibly older, and is 1,642 metres deep at its lowest point. Amazingly, it also

contains around 20% of the world's unfrozen surface fresh water. All this was so interesting that for a moment I even forgot my nerves!

E What was the most fascinating of all though was hearing about the New Year's day dive, which has been carried out by professional scuba divers since 1982. The divers plant a New Year tree on the lake bed, then perform a dance around it! It sounds like fun but it's quite dangerous too as the divers dive around 40 metres down carrying about 100 kg of equipment.

F As I finally jumped through the hole in the ice, the incredible underwater landscape made any nerves I still felt completely disappear. The cave-like stalactite roof and crystal clear blue waters made me feel like I was on another planet. I could see shoals of fish and a field of bright green sponges 20 or 30 metres ahead of me! Our guide had told us that because of the high levels of oxygen in the water, Baikal hosts over 1,000 species of plants and over 1,500 of animals, about 80% of which are found nowhere else in the world.

G After the dive, the fun was far from over. We all treated ourselves to a traditional sauna, which had travelled with us on a sleigh. As I relaxed in the 50°C heat, it really seemed as if life couldn't get any better!

1. Feeling unsure
2. All about the lake
3. Grabbing an opportunity
4. A risky tradition
5. Getting ready to jump in
6. Admiring the beauty
7. Experiencing a unique world
8. The enjoyment went on

A	B	C	D	E	F	G