

York Sub Aqua Club Newsletter

Bottom Times

Oct 2004 Issue 8



Just one of the pictures from this year's BSAC Come and Dive Week. Our club gave about 25 people their first taste of diving, and have so far signed up at least one new member. If you would like to volunteer to take people on their first underwater experience in the pool, please contact the Training officer Pete Dalton. Many thanks to all those club members who gave their time this year.

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Chairman's Chat

"Here's hoping for another year's excellent diving. Only half as good as last year will be quite something!" That's a quotation from Chairman's Chat from the edition that was published at the start of the season. I certainly put the mockers on it, didn't I? Intensely cold weather in the earlier part of the season, with water temperatures of only 4 or 5 degrees made for energy sapping dives. I've lost count of the number of trips to the North-East Coast that were cancelled or having got there, only one or two dives were accomplished due to bad weather. This includes fog, when the sea was mirror-flat, but of course it would have been too dangerous to allow diving to proceed.

And it is not only the trips to the North-East and St Abbs that have suffered. Cathy's trip to Anglesey was also affected, and I understand that the weather at Scapa was the worst in the seven years that the club has been going there. Of course the Flow is sheltered, so no dives were lost on that trip, but if the weather is against you for the whole of the time you are there, it does detract from the pleasure. Anyway, you all know who to blame – guilty as charged.

Still, we did manage to some diving in off both the North-East Coast and the Yorkshire Coast, my first (and last) dive on the Long Benton amongst them. Most of our usual Farne Islands' sites were visited, along with the Somali. I count myself fortunate that I was in the contingent of happy souls who went to Gozo on Ian Hodginson's trip.

Dives for next season are already going up on the notice board. Book early to avoid disappointment! No long range forecast is given for the weather, but surely it can't be worse than this year!

On the social scene, there were about 35 of us who went on the curry night at the Jaipur Spice on 2 October, and as before had a great time. Thanks go to Vicky for organizing the event. She has already sorted out the Christmas dinner and disco, for Friday 17 December at the Royal Dragon. For those who don't know where the restaurant is, it is on the Inner Ring Road, between Laurence Street and Cemetery Road, close to the Barbican. Cost, including disco, is £18-50. Please help Vicky by booking and paying early.

Yours in Diving, Ian

It is my sad duty to report on the death of Michael Needham. Although he wasn't a member of York Sub-Aqua Club, he did his early training with us. He was a relative of Peter Dalton and his dive buddy on many trips. Those members who were on the trip to Mull last September will no doubt recall Michael's happy disposition, his enthusiasm for diving and the manner in which he entered into the social side of the trip.

Michael was diagnosed as suffering from cancer soon after his return from Mull, and died from the disease in late September. Peter delivered a very moving eulogy in a non-secular service at York Crematorium on 4 October. IS

Why On Earth Do We Do It? Neil Hudson, Ocean Diver, wonders.

The Beginning

From the first Try Dive in the pool to getting really wet at Capernwray I knew I had found the hobby for me. I'm still wondering where all this pool training with Nick will eventually lead me to, especially now as we are now doing the sports diver training which seems to begin with a very intimate nose job and which we need to practice until we are very fluent in it. I'm hoping my planned holiday in Barbados will sort that out for me: just why I am doing these strange intimate things with almost strangers...



The Middle

So Barbados was as many of you said in the club absolutely fabulous. We had seven dives and saw many fantastic creatures as we entered what can only be described as a whole new world to me. Whether it was Sergeant majors, Barracudas, a ray or one of the many turtles we saw it all amazed me and if I was not struck on diving before then I certainly am now. I must apologize to Gary for breaking the rules and diving the Stravonika (30 metres deep) but the honest truth is I could not resist it as I saw it as the highlight of my diving in Barbados and was not disappointed as it proved to be a great wreck. The most important thing about diving in Barbados was just how easy it is out there in those lovely warm waters and how my training with York BSAC enabled me to make it look easy. We dived in shorts and t-shirts and I found all my pool training brought everything together well. I must thank Nick Eden for that as my instructor and Pete for the training at Capernwray, which myself and my buddy Steve, have found invaluable since.

Neil prepares to give another intimate nose job

The Future

The club members seem to have an enormous faith in diving off the coast of Great Britain. I have no reason to disbelieve this, but so far we have one cancelled trip to Howick and one trip to Bridlington. I unfortunately I could not get on this one due to being let down by a babysitter, but Steve reported back to me with a great line about the dive which was "Well it was certainly an experience"....I think they had vis of at best one metre... But have no fear all you die hards I have not given up yet with British waters and have managed to buy all the kit needed and will endeavour to conquer those cold murky depthshowever just as a back up I have booked Tenerife for November to get a few more dives in. Lastly I would like to thank everyone from York BSAC for welcoming me to the club and for your hospitality and patience.

Nurse! Matron! Where's me teeth? Ian Salmons reports on GOZO 2004

Bin there, read the book, seen the film, got the tee shirt - the turquoise ones with **GOZO 2004** on the back and that are rapidly getting towards their use by date. What superlatives can do justice to this superb trip that was so well organized by Ian Hodgkinson? It was a pleasure from start to finish.



Our accommodation in a lovely converted farmhouse at the edge of a village proved to be the ideal base. You could almost touch the calm, it was so peaceful. Sun terrace, barbeque, swimming pool – it had the lot.

The diving was a mixture of shore diving which we planned ourselves and travelled to in a fleet of open jeeps and boat diving organised by Frankie's Dive Centre, where we got our fills. The scenery around Gozo is very rocky and that continues underwater, with many dramatic swim thoughts and caves to explore.

One of the highlights of the week was our day at the Blue Hole and Azure Window at Dwerja. The Azure Window is a huge rock arch, almost rectangular in shape, and the blue sea and sky beyond give it its name. The afternoon dive was nearby, in The Inland Sea. A land-locked expanse of water is connected to the sea by a narrow tunnel through the limestone cliffs. Small clinker-built boats take tourists out through the tunnel, so care had to be exercised when diving. On exiting the tunnel on the open seaward end, there are stupendous drop-offs to be seen. Marine life was varied and plentiful, including the largest octopus I have ever seen. Definitely the best dive so far for me. A cool beer at one of the café-bars, supped in the late afternoon sun rounded off a perfect day.



Some of our party ventured over to Malta mid-week to explore and have a dive on the oil tanker Um el Farouk. Large holes have been made in the hull and superstructure, so penetration is easy, and the wreck has a light, airy ambience. Despite a long day driving round (and round Malta) we even managed a night dive when we got back to Gozo.

Boat diving included the tugboat Rozi, the Crystal lagoon, the ferry the Imperial Eagle and the wonderful Comino Caves. These made a lovely dive to finish our holiday. Marine life in abundance, and truly spectacular underwater scenery – caves, caverns, swim-throughs, rock arches – it had the lot.



Our last full day was spent decompressing in sheer luxury on board Frankie's 46ft yacht, slowly circumnavigating Gozo. A truly beautiful vessel, with elegant lines, finished in teak, I could think of no better way to end the holiday. All the party owes a huge debt of gratitude to Ian for organizing the trip and negotiating with Frankie to get the day boat and the yacht at favourable prices.

Brid and Chips – Sue Tuckett Reports

After some early season try-out dives at the Farne Islands, Sugar Free and her crew had great plans for a summer of 'Exploration Diving' in Bridlington Bay. Needless to say it didn't quite work out like that but there were some very interesting moments!

It's a comfortable drive over to the coast and back in a day while for a very reasonable £4, the boat can snuggle down in the compound overnight to cut down the towing on multi-day trips. Friendly, ruddy faced tractor drivers provide an effortless launch and recovery and after one or two trips they soon get to know you. Often they are waiting on the beach with the trailer ready and a cheery smile before you've carefully navigated those last few metres through the shallows.

After two or three specially chosen week-ends checking out new GPS marks, meticulous planning and doing work up dives on some of the more well known wrecks in the bay, our ultimate goal of a 50m dive on a WW1 submarine on 14th August had to be abandoned due to near 'phenomenal' seas! The conditions in Bridlington Bay can look absolutely perfect from the beach, but often give no indication of what will face you beyond Flamborough Head!

Nevertheless we had some good dives on Diana, Feltre (so good we did it twice didn't we Gary!) and Staxton Wyke and managed to avoid the thick fog that plagued the Farnes on one occasion. And I'm sorry to rub it in but we DID have a fantastic dive on the Longbenton – a lovely wreck in 18m – just the job as an introduction to Wreck diving for newly qualified Ocean Divers..... except on the second trip when we actually TOOK all the newly qualified Ocean Divers!

Maybe you can't always rely on good diving at Brid but de-briefing over Fish and Chips at Wetwang on the way home is impossible to beat! Thanks to everyone who crewed Sugar Free on her trips to Brid Bay in 2004 and especially Gary – well, it is HIS boat after all!

A Season Without Bubbles - Brian Goddard

Regular readers will have seen my previous article on the Inspiration try-dive late last year. So impressed was I that along with my son I purchased the unit, and since qualifying in January I have now completed over 50 dives with it. I thought you would be interested in my experiences during what has proved to be a steep learning curve.



There are many myths about the Inspiration. Its nick name, Yellow Box of Death (YBOD), hardly fills anyone with confidence. The majority of incidents, diving the unit have clearly been due to operator error. While this indicates that the equipment is far more reliable than the statistics suggest, it is clear that the scope for operational errors is far greater than on open circuit (OC). Hands up any diver who has not jumped in the water without an essential piece of equipment, or their air turned off? On OC this is embarrassing and a great laugh for the rest of the crew, on closed circuit (CC) it can and has proved fatal.

Underwater, closed circuit diving is a whole new experience. The lack of bubble noise is very relaxing, but it is in the thirty meter plus range where greater bottom times, much reduced decompression requirements and no gas consumption problems provide a distinct advantage. Initially one of my major concerns was the increased task loading required to dive the unit. In practice this has proved to be insignificant for the majority of the dive. Descents and ascents require greater diligence to monitor the rapidly changing oxygen partial pressure, but once at depth the unit quickly stabilizes and has a rhythm that you quickly become attuned to, monitoring the computers every couple of minutes becomes automatic.

The down side of CC diving is the cost and additional maintenance requirements. If you struggle to understand the intricacies of your OC equipment and how to keep it working correctly, CC diving is not for you. After every days diving the scrubber has to be removed from the unit, emptied of water and the head dried to ensure the three oxygen sensors function correctly the next day. Prior to diving the unit has to be rebuilt and checked for leaks. Every three hours of diving the scrubber chemical (Sofnolime) has to be replaced and packed correctly, cost £8. The Inspiration has an initial cost in excess of £4,000 and an annual running cost of approximately £250 in addition to the cost of consumable and gas. To warrant this outlay requires the unit to be used frequently, my 50 hours on the unit to date is, I consider, at the bottom end of the viable usage rate. It is not until you undertake deep technical diving using Trimix that the unit starts to provide payback.



Twin 12 litre cylinders cost approximately £120 per fill with Trimix for a 70 meter dive. The 3 litre diluent bottle on the Inspiration costs approximately £5 to fill with Trimix and provides sufficient gas for two dives to 70 metres. Add to this the approximate £5 cost of oxygen consumed for the two dives and it can be seen that the savings are significant.

Despite the additional cost and maintenance I am a convert to CC diving and do not envisage going back to OC. I am currently waiting for Trimix training on the unit ready for next season's diving and the opportunity to dive sites hitherto beyond me.

"Anglesey, a jewelled cap on the pig's head that is Wales" (no comment) Cathy Moore reports

"Proximity to some of the most outstanding areas of natural beauty around the UK", "the diving around Anglesey is some of the best in the UK", "virgin wreck heaven". With phrases like this running round my head, we set off for Anglesey one weekend in June with high hopes. We'd booked a hardboat, the Julianne, run by Elfyn Jones out of a village called Amlwch on the north east side of the Island. And that was our first mistake. Not the boat itself, which seemed reasonably comfortable for summer day diving. No problem either with the skipper, who may well have been able to place us perfectly on the "wealth of wrecks" surrounding the island. No, the problem was, as ever this year, the weather and Amlwch itself. (The lack of vowels should have warned me).

In the hope that this copy of Bottom Times never falls into the hands of a Welshman, I can only describe Amlwch as a godforsaken hole, with all the atmosphere of a morgue. No lack of B&B's: one of which even had room for the club motor home, but a complete lack of any eating places of the sort required by divers – somewhere, anywhere, between fish and chip shops and extremely posh hotels. Several of the pubs were pretty dodgy too, although being thirsty divers we managed to get over this.

If the diving had been as good as expected, it might have gone some way to compensating for Amlwch, but it was not to be. Completely blown out on the first day, we set off to the more sheltered western side of the island to do a shore dive expertly reconnoitred the previous day by Sue and Gary, as a back up plan. Not one of my favourite dives. Some of us stayed in the shelter of the bay and floundered about in 4m of kelp for the regulation half an hour, some of us (the lucky ones) were unable to sink due to the lack of depth, and some of us braved the headland and had an unplanned drift dive with a long swim back. Although Hodgy did see a massive dogfish and he was so inspired that along with buddy Paul, they, and they alone, went for an afternoon dive. Or at least that's what they said: my only recollection was seeing them trudge for miles over the sands

in full kit in ankle deep water, until they disappeared from view, showing up in the pub several hours later.

The next day we boarded the boat with high hopes that again were due to be dashed. After battling around the coast in the teeth of a gale for what felt like hours, we had no option but to call the dive when we finally reached the site – it was just too rough to get back onto the boat safely. Elfyn was by now desperate for us to have at least one memorable dive and took us to a more sheltered bay to drop us on what was supposed to be "The Gold Wreck". Nope – zero vis, no wreckage that I could see, and certainly no gold. Clutching our refunds we fled for the Menai Straits and civilisation!

Scapa Snippet - Sue Tuckett reports



At last I was off to Scapa – second only to ‘you know where’ on the list of destinations most yarned about in the bar! But my expectations of 20m viz and sea like glass were rather rudely dispelled after the first dive on Karlsruhe. I think we made out some ship shaped bits in the murk but by the time we had expended every last ounce of energy climbing back onto MV Halton in a seriously rolling sea we didn't care!

Thankfully it did get better, much better and by the end of the week we had logged as least 2 dives on all the Light Cruisers. I finally concluded that my favourite was the Brummer, with so much interesting superstructure still in place and a resident seal escorting us up and down the shot line for added entertainment!

The trip would not have been complete without a dive on the monster battleship Kronprinz Wilhelm and a

tour round the James Barrie in the best viz of the week. (picture above). There was even a scallop dive around F2 and the Barge which provided us with a very yummy supper!

You cannot fail to be impressed at the sight of these armed giants now lying so silently in their watery resting places and a visit to the war graves in the cemetery at Lyness served to bring home the real tragedies that took place all those years ago.

Scapa isn't just a dive trip, its an ‘experience’, whatever the viz and the weather, and I would recommend it to anyone. Many thanks to Dave Bainbridge for, once again, organising a great holiday!