

Another great weekend and why I prefer to dive with Seahorse club not a dive centre!

The club (and I) had another great weekend at Lyme but with the diversity and entertainment you can reasonably expect from the first long weekend of the season.

My 12 year daughter, Joanna, qualified last September and she and I did 6 dives in Tenerife in October. This was her first qualified diving in UK waters and her first open water dry suit dives. A failure to get tickets for the “big weekend” and the discovery that none of her mates were going on the guide camp meant that she would come diving with Daddy, I was third choice. This was great but a little more notice would have given us time to dive in a quarry rather than her first dive in a dry suit and new fins being at sea! A consequence of this and my inexperience led to the development of a new sport “brail diving” and a tow from Miss Pattie, but the weekend also covered fin loss, early entry, a fall off miss Patties ladder, axel repairs, a 45 minute trailer bearing change road side, group breakfasts, and much more.

Friday saw two ribs and 10 divers including Jo and I.

The wind howled and the waves wove white horses and waved them high. We headed to West Bay but one look ruled launching out. Exiting the quay was a little harder than making that decision as the wheel of Dave’s trailer caught the kerb. A split pin failed, dislodged the frame and the trailer rested on the road. Assorted divers rigged the frame back together, drove back to the slip and launched the boat. Numerous toolboxes magically appeared and as I watched helplessly as those with skills repaired the damage and replaced the second split pin just in case. Great comradeship and just a small delay. So now to Portland.

“Off the rails” or roller off

We kitted up, launched the ribs and lost one of the rollers off Mark’s boat trailer! After some hunting, it was never found. We set off west but the wind was against us and so very wet we headed east. Eventually we found some fairly calm waters and everyone splashed in two shifts except Jo and I. The wind blew while we were on the boat and Jo hid out of the wind in the bottom and at the front, it was a very cold wind.

Once everyone had returned we headed to the dredger and Jo and I dived. Mark did a weight test on Jo while I was kitting up but I took an extra kilo just in case. Jo’s first dive in her dry suit in 6 metres and I lost the wreck! How can you not find that Wall? I should have taken a compass bearing but between turning around and keeping 100% attention on my 12 year old..... We swam around a bit but came up after 20 mins or so. It had been our first UK dive and I was happy. Losing the wreck had also not been my first mistake that weekend or my last. Jo enjoyed the dive and that was all that mattered to me. She had been warm and basically dry and in control which is better than she had managed at the pool in her dry suit.

Due to the missing roller getting the rib out of the water was a little harder than normal. But we worked together and managed it; even then the day was not over.

Mark impressed me again demonstrating a level of preparation and skill that I had failed to anticipate.

On the return journey the bearing on the off side trailer wheel went. And just over the brow of a hill west of Abbotsbury there is a 6 metre groove where the hub dug into the road once the wheel had come off. Once again I looked on hoping to pretend I was doing something useful when the best I managed was to get in the sunlight. Mark did the repairs and Malcolm had stood on the top of the hill warning approaching cars and freezing to death in the chill wind. Later relieved by Tony who advised that he had been standing in the wrong place.

The RAC arrived within 45 minutes by which time Mark had produced a spare set of bearings and fixed the problem. At the same time the police turned up at Tony's request to control the traffic. We got safely back to the Shrubbery where Phil and James joined Jo and I in the caravan.

I did not cheat!

The kid's voted "pub" regarding the evening meal. Jo devoured a huge portion of mussels and I treated myself of steak and kidney pie and chips (very naughty). After which we headed back to the caravan and played Mexican Train (a great fun variant on dominoes) with the kids. I say kids but after half an hour the awning was full as most of the club member up there joined us and joined in the game. It was a great evening with much laughter, and I did not cheat! Though some club member disagree about the rules. Fortunately we were not near any other camper so the only people complaining about the noise where Seahorse members that had not come to play.

One diver did an early entry.

Saturday saw us diving on Miss Pattie. The first dive would be at about 18 metres for Jo on the Heroine. There was a bit of a swell and Miss Pattie rocked. Two divers were sitting on the side of Miss Pattie as John manoeuvred to the shot. A wave pushed the boat at a bit of an angle. One member of our crew protected the other from the risk of falling over the side backwards. But this act was enough to unbalancing him and over he went. Very spectacular! I confess, I did rather laugh a lot and was relieved it was not I!

I helped Jo kit up on the rocking boat and started to sort myself out with John helping with my kit and fins. I should have tightened my fins up as they were not as tight as I normally do then but I thought they would be ok as they are always so tight to get off when I get back to the boat (another mistake).

They lifted Jo straight out of the boat weights and everything.

John dropped us in a few metres from the shot but there was a small current and Jo did not make it to the shot line. At the same time James (who was with Phil) was struggling to get down due to problems clearing his ears. I left the shot to join Jo, who then lost one of her fins. John picked us up and sorted out Jo's fin and then threw us a line and towed us back to the shot. But as the boat sped up a little, Jo's grip began to

slip. As she lost the line I grabbed her. Towing Jo and holding the line was never going to work, it was fun but it was not going to last and my grip slipped.

This proved great amusement to the onlookers in the ribs. Mark picked us up in his RIB and they lifted Jo straight out of the boat weights and everything. I unkitted and got aboard and rekkitted, I was a little puffed by now. Then Claire and Mark sorted Jo out and even improved on the way her kit was put together improving on the position of her first stage (another thing I should have checked better). Mark dropped us right on the shot and we began our decent. Unfortunately, after not needing the extra weight for Jo I had not taken it and this time she could not get down despite several attempts. I signalled John to pick us up. Another lesson learnt.

You can't breath though a snorkel underwater

Jo went up the ladder first. I was getting very tired by now and the ladder seemed much harder than I remember especially as I could feel my right fin coming loose. John spotted this as I got higher lent over to take it. I must have leaned slightly to the left to make it easier as the next thing I knew was that you can't breath though a snorkel underwater! I had fallen off the ladder much to the amusement of many whose only regret was their lack of a camera. Logic says reach for your regulator, which should have been in my mouth rather than my snorkel! Reality said push loads of air into the BCD! I swam back to the boat very puffed and got back to the ladder and hung on panting for breath eventually climbing back aboard. I sat on the bench getting the rest of my breath back and Jo came to see if I was OK, and I thought I was looking after her!

We put into West Bay and had a bite to eat. We dived the Baygitano that afternoon. Jo thought it was fantastic. She took her time going down and the decent took some 7 minutes as she needed to take it slow with her ears. She lost a fin briefly but the only downside to her was when I ended our dive as we need more air and I wanted to allow for a long ascent! It turned out to be a slightly faster ascent than I planned but it was OK. I really look forward to doing this dive again with her. She did very well at 18 metres and I greatly enjoyed her being with me.

Saturday evening saw Phil, James, Jo and I dine a little earlier and take a Stroll along the front. A quick game of "The Great Game of Britain" with much laughter, and we got the kids to bed before the divers joined Phil and I in the awning for "chat". OK and a few beers.

Sunday saw the invention of Brail diving!

The main group dived the Sidon, which was too deep for Jo and Jame's ears where preventing him from diving. Mark took Jo and I in towards West bay and we splashed to dive West Bay High Ground. I had added 2 kilos to Jo's kit on the Saturday and we took a gentle decent as Jo cleared her ears. Paul was kindly coming with us to ensure we were OK. I noticed as we went down that Jo keep clearing her mask. My mistake was that I should have stopped the dive, surfaced, sorted out the mask and dived again, but I didn't (big mistake). Once down the shot I put some air in the lift bag and sent the shot up. Jo seemed a little disorientated and Paul looked after her while I did

the shot. We soon found the wall and what looked to be a great dive but something was not right with Jo.

At 18 metres I could not get her to open her eyes!

The plan was that I would put up the DSMB for the dive and Paul would surface before us, on his own DSMB, as he only had a little air left after his first dive. It soon became apparent something was wrong. Jo was not controlling her buoyancy and I followed her down to 20 metres signalling to her but she was not acting as if she understood. She looked OK. I put some air in her BCD and took us up a little. I was focusing on Jo and so unsure where we were now and where the wall was. To my relief Paul appeared as I looked around and so I returned my attention to Jo. Her eyes were closed and I could not get her to open them!

I knew Paul was there and so did not worry about a DSMB as I could see he had put one up. I kept hold of my 12 year old daughter and signalled to Paul, who had come in close, we were going up.

18 metres and eyes wide shut

I realised that the salt water had made her eyes sting and so despite repeatedly clearing her mask it was full again and she now would not open her eyes and it was up to me to make our ascent. I was very glad Paul was there, as I knew I was safe with an experienced dive master so close to hand, so I could focus just on Jo. We began our ascent.

Holding Jo with one hand left me one hand to do my BCD, her BCD, both our dry suits and watch our ascent. I emptied the air out of her BCD and got her to keep her arm up and so I kept it fairly under control, if a little quicker than planned between 18 and 6 metres. But after 6 metres I could not get the air out fast enough, just not enough hands and we bobbed to the surface. However, we had surfaced safely. Mark was with us very quickly and they got Jo to blink and sorted her out. She was a bit shaken and did not dive that afternoon. We referred to the experience as brail diving! We will be visiting a quarry soon to improve her performance and restore her confidence. But like many kids she is very resilient and will dive again soon.

She managed to get through the best part of a ½ lb cheese burger and a large portion of chips leaving only a little for Paul and I. Waiting for the food meant we missed Miss Pattie and ended up on the Rib with Mark. Mark took us out slowly so Jo could eat and share some of her Chips with Paul and I.

Sunday afternoon I dived with mark.

During the weekend I received much advice from Mark and others about weight belts, BCD's and integrated kit. That afternoon I had a great chill out dive with Mark. I have borrowed a weight harness so that I don't need such bulky integrated system but underwater, my integrated system was working that afternoon and I had a great dive with good visibility and great fun watching Mark's scallop catching technique and just enjoying a lovely drift.

Phil and James headed back on Sunday and took Jo home for me for School as planned. I did some sorting out and the guys joined me in the caravan on their return from the pub. After a significant amount of alcohol we went our various ways about 2am.

Cooked Breakfast

Given the previous evening's lateness, perhaps the foul wind of Monday was just as well, no one was going to dive that day. Everyone brought stuff and I cooked breakfast for us, ending up with far more bread than I started with. It was a great way to end the weekend all eating our final weekend meal together, albeit breakfast. It was a great morning but just a shame we were unable to dive as planned.

Bottom line is that I am very glad this weekend was with this club rather than a dive centre! A weekend away among friends who helped and encouraged both my daughter and myself with our diving. I thanks all those who help make this a good experience for Jo.