

## Salcombe revisited - First impressions can be deceptive

### Salcombe

I did not see Brideshead revisited but as a child often wondered why it had that title when, so far as I could tell, there had not been a programme called Brideshead to begin with. However, I was fortunate enough to go on both Salcombe trips.

It was a pretty crap August and July, We had seen numerous dive trips aborted. With a view to having quality family time and selfish dive time, we (Helen, Jo and I) took the caravan to Salcombe for a weeks holiday ending with the clubs dives. It rained, save a great day at the Dartmouth regatta. Friday evening saw the best weather as the tents and Mark's van arrived. We got the kettle on and had a general chat and catch up (I know I had packed 13 chairs for the 3 of us for a reason) prior to the club popping out for a pint and some food.

We assembled on the quay at 9:30 am as instructed, mostly by piling into Marks Transit (again), and at the quay those not camping joined us. The MV Lodesman came along side, dead on schedule. And Jean and Pat welcomed us aboard. We were also joined by a couple looking to buy the boat.

The Lodesman is a large vessel, original designed as a pilot boat but now converted for diving. Loads of kitting up space, and area at the back and a dry lounge area as well as toilets.

You could see why the couple were looking to sell. Pat is in his 70 and Jean had a few miles under her belt. The question was not why were they selling but why had they not done so already. But then first impressions can be deceptive.

We kitted up and dived the Persia. Fantastic dive. I went in Phil and we had a good explore round. I am certain Phil is trying to find a hole that he will slide through with ease and I'll get stuck in! We enjoyed 53 minutes at a max depth of 27 meter with an average of 24 meters. Really great visibility and fantastic dive. A must do again.

All returned up the rather long ladder and all having had great dives with superb visibility. (hell of a giant stride earlier!). Tea was soon available on the aft deck and stories were exchanged. We put into a small attractive sandy cove off the coast and watch the world go by. There wasn't a lot of it but what there was, we watched, and chatted and chilled and relaxed. Half way through the surface interval a cry called out and soup and pasties were ready on the rear deck. No sooner had this been consumed but Pat was asking us to take our first stages off so he could fill our tanks with clean air. I am not the most observant bloke, but the quality of customer care was stunning.



Paul offered to do some underwater video for the couple looking to buy. He did not realise what they had in mind until it was too late to back out and so he did 3 dives that day. One round the ships hull.



The afternoon was a great drift dive. Quite fast, great visibility and really good fun. Up, over and round boulders. Beautiful plant life and good marine life too. We got a wonderful 55 minutes at a max of 22 meters with an average of 17. Another great dive.

When we returned to the quay, Pat demonstrated that dispute the boat being of huge size and he being of many a year he could park it on a six pence.

The evening was spent in Hope Cove at a very pleasant pub and we ate outside the weather was so good. There was obviously a party of some sort going on as pretty young things in ball dresses and males in DJs but with shorts were all over the place. Back to the campsite and while tempted to join the club in Marks Van I decided on family time.

Sunday took us back to the quay side (creek car park) and another great days diving. I

lead the first dive on the Maine with Gary, Phil joined us and as I set off towards the bottom he politely indicated that we (he) would get more bottom time if we explored the deck. And there was plenty to explore. Gary and I went up after 35 minutes and a max of 32 meters giving an average of 22 meters. Phil stayed own and had an extra 20 mins exploring before joining us on deck (we thought about leaving him but he had got our money). The day



followed the same pattern, tea, soup, pasties and air fills. With another excellent drift. (58 minuets at 19 max and 16 meter average). Very colourful.

We were so impressed with Pat and Jean we had a whip round and left a tip. Such a disaster to find them so late. And now it the MV would be sold to service elsewhere.

An excellent discovery. A fantastic skipper/couple. A great boat. And that was it.....we heard a few day later that the boat had been sold to the couple that had been with us that day. And we had only just found her and now she was gone and there were no more Charter boats operating out of Salcombe.

But.....one last chance. Pat still had a couple of weekend left. He had enjoyed us diving with him. A trouble free, easy group who help each other (his description). Salcombe revisited, we were going back.

### Salcombe revisited

Pat and Jean again provided superb service, customer care. And great dives site. Though my diving did not quite go as planned.

I took the caravan down and Phil joined me. The pub saw some of us enjoy excellent food while other had the smallest mixed grill in the existence of mankind. Then back to Marks Caravan for copious quantities of alcohol. To compensate for the meal and sock up the drink we grilled up sausage, bacon, eggs and toast on a sunny Saturday morning. There is a long winded / long running joke about Phil and cooked breakfast but you had to be there for it to work. But the sun shone and it was a great start to the day.

Pat and Jean arrived at the creek car park / quay on the dot. And we met Fred the Ferret (as he became known that weekend), a long standing diving friend of Pat. Everything worked like clockwork and according to plan. Till I put my dry suit on and the zip broke. That was it, I was snookered. Till Mark came to the rescue with the spare suit he had brought down. I could dive.....I could dive. Provided I could get into the suit.



I am not a small chap. Fat really, obsess would be true, more XXXL than XL. I pulled myself into what should have been a loose fitting membrane suit. Mark did ask that I tried not to split the seams and I wondered how the air was going to get from the inlet valve to my legs. Kitting up was a challenge. But I kitted up and dived with Tony F. It was a good dive and Tony was keen to photograph some of the colourful plant life of the Maine



at some 34m. There was a bit of a swell and the suit did not feel right. My buoyancy was under control but not comfortable. So I was not too disappointed when we return to the surface and climbed aboard the boat. But I had dived and was glad for that. (28 meter max, 35 mins and 20mtr average). But I did not really fancy diving again and as it would

take a couple of weeks to fix my zip I'd miss the Littlehampton weekend too. So I was not in great spirits.



While discussing some of this and thanking Mark for the loan, the club came to my aid. Billy was only diving that day and has happy to let me borrow his suit, not only for the Sunday but the coming weekend too as he was not diving. This made all the difference. And with Jean's soup and pasties to further cheer me I dived with Tony again that afternoon. Another enjoyable drift a bit slower than the previous trip but very attractive sea bed and very pleasant with dog fish as you can see. Tony took the SMB as I was still concerned about my buoyancy. We did 24 meters max for 40 min with an average depth of 18 mtrs. It had been a good day and I had enjoyed the company and the dives.

Fred had earned his nickname by now coming up with a big block of coke to take home and burn on his fire.

We went to the Pilot Inn that night and after a very good meal all retired relatively early compared to our indulgency on Friday evening. Sunday was dull and overcast but the sausages, bacon, mushrooms and bread appeared from everywhere and another full scale breakfast gill was enjoyed, by all but one of our crew who for some reason had trouble getting up.

I had foolishly taken only one nitrox tank down on Saturday and had my second to take Sunday. We would be going out at low tide so it would be quite a walk from the car park to the boat. Mark concluded that due to the road works we would be better off sharing carrying my 15ltr tank than trying to drop it and me near the pontoon.

Again the club came to my aid. In the end I only carried the tank about 25 yards with Michael and Derek carrying it almost the whole way. For which I am most grateful. They insisted this was repayment for breakfast, but all I had done was turn a couple of bits of sausage and bacon over. If I tell you who did most of the work and washed up, Phil has sworn to turn my air off next time we dive.

One or two changes on the boat with Billy going and Lee and others joining us. Billy's suit was a better fit than Mark's spare. But Billy is more than a little larger than myself. I also found his size 12 Rock boots had ample space for my size 8 feet. It was a move from the sublime to the ridiculous and Phil leant me a hose as mine had the wrong fitting. But the suit worked a treat and was in fact very flexible despite being too big it work well. I had two excellent dives with Michael. The Oregon was a fascinating wreck with great visibility loads of Lobsters and huge congas in the boilers ( 46 mins, 20 mtr max and 17mtr ave). This was followed by a pleasant drift that afternoon. (47 mins, 21 mtr max and 17 mtr ave). With great viz. And Billy's offer saved the Littlehampton weekend for me too.

Mark came back from the first dive having found a fishing rob and tried to get this baby dog fish to bit us. A competition began. Fed had already



been line fishing off the back of the boat on Saturday. He was now joined by first time fisherman Derek, while Mark fished from the front with his “new” rod. I dare not say who won but I think the Lobster Mark brought up from the first dive is a clincher.



There was a very touching and moving farewell. This had been Pat and Jean last trip. We were the last club to go out with them. It was an honour to have been there.