

Scapa Flow September 2007

I don't know if the funniest moment was the expression on John and Tony's faces when they found they had a double bed at the stop over on the way up. The discovery that Phil's increasingly desperate sign language meant I had, for the third time swum under the huge war gun he had been trying to show me before I finally raised my eyes and saw it. My wife's phone call telling me that while I was away she had bought a spa bath with integrated TV and DVD player. The expression on Michael's face when he realised he had forgotten his weight belt or Ross's response when Michael eventually got down the shot line!

Having split the party into 3 groups of 4, 8 of us took our dive gear to Mark's van on Thursday night and then we all set off with our respective drivers Friday morning. An excellent stopover at an Inverness Travel Lodge meant we had "only" a 2 1/2 hour drive to the Ferry on Saturday Morning. The smooth crossing brought us into Stromness about 1:30 pm leaving us the afternoon to stow our gear and explore.



A week, and 13 terrific dives later,

meant that Saturday morning saw us catch the 9 o/c ferry back to the mainland, again passing the huge rock tower that is "the old man of Hoy", and begin the 650 miles (though some went via John O'Groats) journey to Swindon finally getting home between 10:30 and 11:30 (ie the J O'Gs) that night.



The MV Invincible provided compact but adequate berths, an honesty bar and plenty of space on deck to store gear and kit up. Pretty excellent.



Fiona (Ian [The skipper]'s Wife) did a sterling job preparing porridge (or cereal) and toast for us

before the first dive and a full Scottish cooked breakfast after we were back on board, we needed no more till evening. To Suggest Ian and Fiona are a terrific couple would be the understatement of the year. They were great and run a fantastic service.



The visibility on most dives was excellent and normally in the 10-20 meter range.

We dived the three huge dreadnoughts with the deepest 42 meters to the big guns. These ships had turned turtle as they sank placing the guns on the seabed. We dived the Kronprinz Wilhelm twice with a mere 36.5 meters to the huge main guns. The second dive was so that Phil could lead the Mark and Dave with a Reel (attached to the shot) straight to the guns. The remaining divers following the reel line from the shot to the guns. They were fairly well hidden and no one had spotted them on the first dive, though Phil had known where they were, so he and I saw them twice 😊. The scale of these dreadnaughts was vast and most agreed too great to comprehend what was really being dived. But they are a must dive.

Our first dive was the Brummer, a cruiser at 32 meters to the bottom, which proved so popular it was the only other repeat dive we did. Again the scale of these cruisers is vast but small enough to take in and see what you are diving. The Cruisers were more up right and mainly lay on their sides providing access to look over their decks and super structure. The Brummer was the most intact.

We called into Lyonesse on four occasion for our mid day stop. This provided us with good time to wander round the Scapa Flow museum and read about the fateful events that lead up to the German fleet being scuttled. And the mammoth salvage activity that took place subsequently. The caretaker type person is fantastic, if you go, talk to him.



The scenery in the Orkney's is stunning and we were extremely fortunate with the weather. Stunning sun sets, sun rises and views. Chugging out Sunday morning for the first time had to be an experience to put at ease, it was awesome. Slowly moving out towards the more barren hill. Truly a stunning setting that has to be hard to beat. A terrific bonus as we had gone for the diving.

We dined out most night though the Chippie attracted many of us on two or three nights. Eating places were adequate and we had a cracking meal at the bistro on our final night, in fact we emptied the wine cellar of it's 6 bottles! We also visited Kirkwall seeing the cathedral and Bishop's place and ate at the Orkney's only Indian!

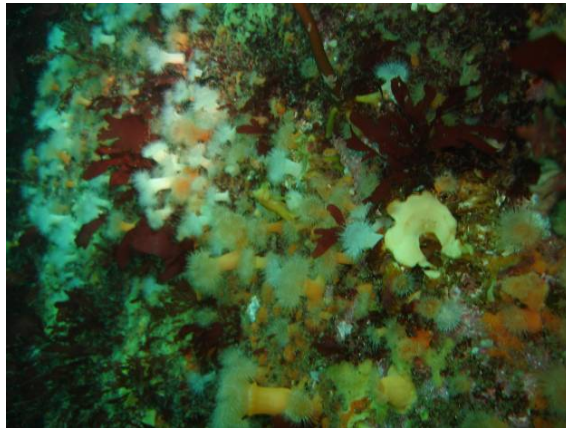


While there are many Tourist attractions the one we all focused on was the Italian Chapel which enable Phil to revisit am ambition from his last trip and successfully found the only country pub on the Island. Our presence at which more than quadrupled the occupancy at that time.

Many of the party also enjoyed trips to the Stromness Museum and Art Gallery.

While Ross, Dave and I enjoyed the gallery, I don't think the actual art was quite our cup of tea.

The Wrecks largely intact and being only 90 years old were covered with marine life. Untold variety of dead men's finger and plumrose anemonies etc.



The Tarbarka was a fantastic 60 minute at some 12-16 meters mainly spent inside the wreck. Over boilers round corners. Absolutely brilliant. Has to have been a favourite for me.



The F2 was also very popular featuring two wrecks for one dive as a barge attempting to salvage the F2's guns sunk under the weight of two of them. It was on this Dive that Dave handed Phil and I two soft weights enabling me to replace the weight's I had lost on the Dresden (see below).

When we dived the Doyle, Ian (skipper) had us line up like penguins and the jump in one after the other like lemmings and straight down as the current was picking up significantly. Great fun.

The wrecks are shotted and normally we are able to go down the shot with ease, but on a couple of dives proved a little less straight forward.



Three dives were a little disappointing, but I would do them again at the drop of a hat:-

(1) The Dresden – another terrific cruiser as every diver told me as they came back on board. And I am sure that had a weight pouch not fallen to the seabed shortly after I began my decent, I would have agreed. I managed to get down the shot line with no air in my suit (it was a bit tight) and told Phil I was not diving so he was able to team up and dive with someone else. And still my Sunnto made me do a safety stop! (thank goodness for the shot line). (2) The James Barrie should have been superb, but a group of Techy divers jumped in rather than wait 15 minutes for us to get out of the way and so the decent took 11 minutes using up almost all my no deco time at 39 meters. (3) Finally the Karsruh II in which we lost the shot line, due to divers and strong current, and after a 20 minute swim found the wreck due to Phil’s excellent navigation. Unfortunately, the swim against the current rather took it out of me and my air supply. Phil explored the guns and I explored nearer the shot holding onto the wreck which at times meant the current kept me at 90 degrees. All three are defiantly dives I would do again especially the James Barrie.



In addition to the landscape and stunning sky we watched some dolphins porpoising, seals swimming and simply popping up above the surface and some even saw a Minky Whale on the way back. There were some stunning rainbows on the way up, to which our observation of provided a good opportunity to test the BMW’s brakes ☺ as we simultaneously arrived at some road works.

Listing the details and enjoyment of each dive would have got too anorak like, if you want more dive details click here: <http://www.scapaflow.co.uk/> So in summary we dived:

When	Dive	Depth	Duration	Comment
23/9 am	Brummer (cruisers)	32	45	Fantastic first dive. Very intact and lots to see. Loads of fish
23/9 pm	Tarbaka (barge)	17	60	Great penetration dive
24/9 am	Kronprinz Wilhelm (Dreadnought)	37	45	Huge guns. Massive ship. Could have been drifting over the sea bed at times
24/9 pm	Doyle (cruisers)	16	43	Nice and very fast drift dive. Though some had a great

				penetration dive too.
25/9 am	Markgraf (Dreadnought)	42	25	My deepest ever and deco went too fast
25/9 pm	Coln II	30	45	Gun, bridge, huge crab.
26/9 am	Konig (Dreadnought)	36	36	Too big to take in. Huge "blue/grey" fish hiding between plates
26/9 pm	Dresden	24	11	Would have been great with weights! Everyone told me it had been!!!!
26/9 pm	F2 and YC21	15	48	Great double wreck dive
27/9 am	Kronprinz Wilhelm (Dreadnought)	37	47	Phil lead Dave/Mark with reel to guns everyone followed the reel line from the shot. Success!
27/9 pm	Brummer (cruisers)	32	42	I missed the seal everyone else saw! Great swim through
28/9 am	James Barrie	39	26	Looks great but was too crowded
28/9 pm	Karsruhe	27	38	Where was the shot? Plenty to see.



I would certainly go there again. It is not just the dives, and how could you beat them, it was the entire package. Not just a great boat and crew. Not just great and stunning scenery. Not just somewhere that takes you back in time and treats you like people. It was the great company that made it an out of the world trip for me. My thanks to Phil for organising the trip (and my dives) and the rest of those that went for a truly terrific week.

