

Diving the HMS Scylla and James Egan Layne.
Sunday 22nd February 2009-03-08
Ryan, Tony , Steve, and Lee.

Report by Ryan Curtis

We set off from Swindon at 7am to travel down in two cars to Plymouth. This was a nice steady drive with one comfort stop. We arrived at Aquanauts Dive centre on the Barbican with plenty of time to spare to board our dive boat and meet our skipper. But trying to park and locate change to feed the parking meter was the first adventure as it seems the charges for a Sunday are now the same as a week day. Steve located change and we parked up making the kit up a bit of a rush.

We set off for the first dive site, the HMS Scylla. I was looking forward to this as my late Grandad helped to build this ship when he worked in the Dockyard at Plymouth.

We were on the boat with several students and instructors from Aquanauts, we were all made very welcome. It turned out my Dad knew Doug the skipper from years ago when he dived with the Police Dive Club.

The Scylla Reef is the wreck of F71 HMS Scylla, a Leander-class frigate that served in the Royal Navy between 1970 and December 2003. During her commission she performed a variety of roles, from patrols in Icelandic waters during the second and third 'Cod Wars' to royal escort duties for the Queen's Silver Jubilee. She also provided humanitarian relief in the Cayman Islands during 1980 when hurricanes threatened the lives of many of the inhabitants, before being modified to have Exocet and SeaWolf missile launchers fitted. After being decommissioned, she was bought by the National Marine Aquarium and sunk on the 27th of March 2004 in Whitsand bay near Plymouth, where she now lies creating an artificial reef for divers, the first of its kind in Europe.

This was to be the first dive in my O Three dry suit since its overhaul at the factory to fit me again. Since buying it I have grown. I had tried to sort out the weight I would need in the pool so should be about right.

I entered the water with my dad and did a 33 minute dive getting a max depth of 18.5 meters and felt really good to be back in the sea after several months. I did need a couple more kgs but once this was sorted, on the decent I didn't have any problems. I did lose my snorkel somehow out of its keeper but Steve picked it up at the bottom of the shot line as they were next in. So it was returned back on the dive boat later. If I was old enough to buy beer I owe him one, never mind he will have to wait few more years. So it will just be a thank you Steve for now.

I did what I wanted to do and saw most of the wreck but did start to get very cold, as I only wore a single undersuit and the water was 7°C in the shadow of the wreck. I know for the future to put a few more layers on.

Steve and Lee dived together and some of their photos are used in this report.



Back on the dive boat the wind had picked up and I wasn't feeling that good. I was really cold and a bit sea sick so I decided not to do the next dive.

Steve, Lee, and my Dad dived the James Egan Layne next; he did a 44 minute dive getting a max depth of 22.4 meters.

So a bit of history :-

The James Egan Layne lies shotted in Whitsand Bay, Plymouth, and is an extremely popular British wreck because of its depth. It sank in March 1945 after ferrying men and materials across the world for the war effort. At the height of World War II it was clear that cargo vessels were being sunk at a rate faster than which they could be built. In an effort to maintain the supply of food vehicles and other equipment to the troops, the Americans found a way of welding aptly called 'Liberty' ships together that were 400 feet long weighing in at around 7000 tons in just 24 hours by an almost entirely female workforce. After being hit by a torpedo from a German U-boat near the Eddystone reef, the James Egan Layne was towed towards Plymouth in order to save as much of her cargo as possible. However on the way back, her stern collapsed

causing her to sink in Whitsand bay, where she still sits upright, pointing north towards the shore.

So after we were all back on the dive boat we sailed back to the Barbican, dekkitted and made our separates ways home to Swindon.

I went across the Tamer with my Dad to visit my Auntie in Saltash. It was great to see her and warm up with a nice cup of coffee and a bit of a snack before driving home after a lovely father and son day out.

Thanks to Steve for organising the trip.