

Report on “The National Diving and Activity Centre”, Tidenham, Chepstow.

Directions

From the M4, take the M48 and cross the toll bridge. Follow signs for Chepstow. Proceed through Chepstow on the A48. Approximately 1.2 miles after Chepstow, you will go under a tall railway bridge and the dive centre is immediately on your left at the top of the hill. The entrance is not very visible and is easy to drive past.

Facilities

The toilets are separate from the changing area which provides ample room. There are no showers available.

There is a hot food van similar to Vobster's with a good menu. The usual hot drinks, huge burgers and bacon sarnies are available as well as curries and chips. There is an outside eating area and a small heated portacabin which provides shelter to eat your food or rest if the weather is not its best. The weather was very poor when we dived so the portacabin got very full very quickly.

A reasonably well equipped shop; will encourage you to part with your money.

Gas fill area if you require tank fills.

Parking

A spacious parking area is available, which provides mats to keep your equipment as clean as possible. The car park is rough stones and mud therefore can get very messy, particularly when raining. There are trolleys available to manoeuvre your equipment to the centre of the car park where there is an area to place your equipment whilst awaiting your transport to the dive site.

From the parking area you can get a birds eye view of the dive site which assists you to plan your dive.

Transport

Two vans transport you to and from the dive site. The dive site is not far but is down a steep slope therefore making it awkward and difficult to walk to, particularly with your equipment. At the drop-off zone and on the floating pontoon, there is ample kitting up areas.

The quarry

The water looks a very beautiful green colour. We have been assured that the visibility is usually very good but on the day that we were diving the weather was awful with rain and hailstone showers. The visibility was poor but could have been a lot worse considering the weather. As always, silt is a major factor but some areas are quite stoney.

There are high, vertical rock walls surrounding the dive site and you need to stay well away from them (warning signs say stay at least 3m from rock face). On a couple of occasions we heard splashes in the water as rocks were tumbling due to the excessive rain.

As well as ample kitting up areas on the floating pontoon there is also a shed where you are able to leave your car keys whilst diving. Strategically placed along the pontoon are alarm buttons to summon help if required. Dive centre staff are always on hand on the pontoon.

I have been reliably informed that pike are sometimes seen, particularly around the pontoon, but we did not see any. We mainly saw Rudd fish, many small ones in schools. They are not as friendly or inquisitive as the Vobster Quay brown trout but lovely to see.

There is a wide range of items sunk in the quarry, all of which are described on the website www.ndac.co.uk. During our dives we were able to see a boat, 2 x armoured personnel vehicles, a North Sea diving bell, a plane and its wing and a gnome garden (a load of tyres and bollards designed to look like a castle). There are also several large tubes designed for swim-throughs.

On our dives we only stayed above the 18 metre mark where there is plenty to look at, but the quarry is able to provide diving to a greater depth where there are many more items to see.

After your dive

There are ladders available at regular intervals along the pontoon to assist in your exit. The pontoon is not too high above the water level so your exit is not too difficult.

There is a steep small incline from the pontoon to the pick-up area for the transport. This enables you to work up an appetite for the massive burger!

Once loaded into the van it is a short, steep and very bumpy journey back up the hill, with the van at full throttle and revs. The journey is quite an experience.

Conclusion

Very good dive site with plenty to see. It's ideal as a training location due to training platforms at various depths and a variety of wrecks to explore. The only slight down side is the wait to transport you to and from the dive site; it's not too long but a lot of people congregate during busy periods. Give it a try!

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