

Isles of Scilly Trip Report

The week of diving in the Isles of Scilly started with a long journey from Swindon down to Penzance on the Friday afternoon. Terrible traffic meant that everyone was ready for a drink that evening, with a clear conscience as there was no diving the next day!

The party consisted of:

Mark Horton, Dave Hall, Andrew Hancox, Phil Green, Mark Shipway, Andrew Osborne, Malcolm Cole, Paul Cole, Ross Smith, myself and my girlfriend, Pauline.

An early start on Saturday led to the dive gear being loaded into containers and vans/car parked before breakfast, which turned out to be a showcase of technological achievement as we were all amazed by the electric pepper grinder proudly wielded by the landlady, complete with light to allow accurate aim onto our full English! The amazing gadget was strictly no touchy touchy for us mere mortals – though I suspect the landlady was disappointed by our lack of reaction to her pride and joy.

The ferry journey from Penzance to St Mary's included a commentary as we passed sites of interest, including several sightings of basking sharks. With the ferry arriving in St Mary's at lunchtime, this gave everyone time to check into their B&Bs, locate the local hostelrys, or for the very keen, take an open top bus ride!

That evening we met up with the boat's skipper, Dave McBride, but not until Ross had enthralled us with stories of "movements" and introduced us to the concept of rusty dry suits. Little did we know that this would be a continuing theme for the trip!

To change the subject, and pass the time, everyone named their first album. No doubt the most embarrassing was Ross' choice, as I'm sure you'll agree:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nEwlnByCJoM>

Several other embarrassing/interesting incidents followed during the week, including:

- The effect of kelp on Paul, which apparently makes him "go all dizzy"
- Malcolm's admission of dreaming about Andrew Defending him in court against a mystery policeman ... I wonder who that could be?
- Andrew H snoring so loudly that he kept Ross awake ... in a different room!
- Mark locking himself out of his room at half past midnight and sleeping on the lounge floor with pillows piled on him for warmth. When Dave went to the loo in the early morning all he offered a freezing Mark was a coat!
- Ross' deliberations on the marketing opportunity for "flavoured air" in diving cylinders See above for hints on the type of flavouring involved!

We were lucky enough to have fantastic weather all week, although the wind direction limited our choice of dive locations.

Evening food in St Mary's was fantastic with a different eatery sampled each night (mainly thanks to Phil's booking). During the week we visited pretty much every restaurant that St Mary's had to offer, as well as all the pubs (purely for research purposes). Most of the group settled on the Mermaid Inn and the Atlantic Inn as our

preferred watering holes, though one member of the group couldn't resist the burger and chip deal in the decidedly run down pub across town!

On the penultimate night our skipper (Dave McBride) had his weekly slide show in the church hall. We arrived just in time to grab the last of the seats as the hall was packed. The show started with some amazing photos that Dave has taken over his 30 odd years of diving. It included old photos of his father, with whom he dived as a child, helping to set dynamite on wrecks to open them up to find treasures inside! The slides then moved onto the main focus of the show – the wrecks and the tradition of wrecking on the Isles of Scilly. The slides provided a great insight into how even the modern day Islanders carry on with their tradition of wrecking – and some of the finds they've had off of recent wrecks. The show is very comical and is highly recommended if you're ever spending a Thursday night in St Mary's!

For our final night we headed to the nearby island of St Agnes where Paul Cole celebrated his 500th dive and we ate another great meal before beating a hasty retreat when the Jazz band started and the pub become mobbed.

So, to the diving.....

Sunday, Dive 1 – St Martin's Deep Ledge

This was a dive on a wall that dropped down to about 65 metres. The wall seemed to disorientate most of the buddy groups, with the wall seeming to go in random directions, to such an extent that some people were sure it was a pinnacle as they seemed to end up where they started from. The disorientation, combined with SMBs getting tangled on overhead rocks, or with lines from other buddy groups at different depths made the dive "interesting"!

Sunday, Dive 2 – HMS Colossus

([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HMS_Colossus_\(1787\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HMS_Colossus_(1787)))

HMS Colossus was a 74-gun third-rate ship of the line of the Royal Navy. She was launched at Gravesend on 4 April 1787 and lost on December 10, 1798. The wreck was easy enough to find by following a line from the bottom of a permanent shot line. This leads you to a plaque and then it is a case of exploring the wreck site without losing it due to the kelp (easy to do). There were several canons buried in the sea bed, which were the main interest of the dive.

Monday, Dive 1 – Plympton and Hathor

This turned out to be an excellent dive site, providing two wrecks for the price of one!

The Plympton, a steamship of 2869 tons was on its way from Falmouth to Dublin with a cargo of maize. On the night of 14 April 1909 she encountered thick fog, and she steamed full tilt onto the Lethergus reef where she stuck fast.

Eleven years later the 7060 ton German steamship Hathor was being towed to Portland after breaking down near the Azores. As she reached the Scillies a fierce gale erupted which parted the hawsers of her two tugs. The Hathor was abandoned to the storm and eventually hit the Lethergus Rocks sinking right across the remains of the Plympton.

The two wrecks provided an excellent dive, with plenty to see and explore. The wreck lies at quite an angle on the sea bed, which provided perfect multi level profiles.

Monday, Dive 2 – HMS Firebrand

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HMS_Firebrand_\(1694\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HMS_Firebrand_(1694))

Firebrand was lost in 1707 when a disastrous navigational error sent Admiral Sir Cloudesley Shovell's fleet through the reefs near the Isles of Scilly. Firebrand, Association, Eagle, and Romney were lost, with a total of 1500 sailors.

The Firebrand is an excellent historical dive, with plenty of canons lined up and waiting to be explored.

Tuesday, Dive 1 – Plympton and Hather

A return to the Plympton and Hather which gave us all a great opportunity to really explore the wrecks now that we all had our bearings after the first dive.

Tuesday, Dive 2 – Canon pile near Firebrand

Canons? What cannons?!! I'm not sure if anyone found any canons, but Ross and I certainly didn't, so the dive turned into an exploration of the sea bed, in the hope of long lost treasure But all we ended up with was a glass jar, now being used as a flower vase.

Wednesday, Dive 1 – The Italia

The Italia was lost on the Wingletang ledges in dense fog on 11 May 1917. There's plenty to see on this dive, with the engines and steam machinery all laid out. A quick dive down to the bow at 40 metres allows a slow ascent up the rest of the wreck into the shallows to get the most out of your bottom time.

Wednesday, Dive 2 – Wall dive

Amazing dive along a deep wall. How deep? Ask Mark! It's at least 58 metres anyway!

Thursday, Dive 1 – Black Rock, Western Isles

Another wall dive with some great gulleys and swim-throughs. Plenty to see and a fairly big surge to make things even more interesting! The dive was topped off for me and Ross by an encounter with a friendly seal in the shallows. Fantastic!

During our surface interval, Dave (our skipper) and Mark S took to the sea in the boat's dingy to visit the rocky islands to photos the seals. In the meantime, Ross and I donned dry-suits, mask and snorkel to try and swim with the seals we could see on the surface. Whilst the seals didn't seem to have a problem coming close to divers with SCUBA, they seemed quite cautious of snorkelers. They were still inquisitive, but kept their distance.

Thursday, Dive 2 – The Italia

Back to the Italia!

Friday, Dive 1 – The Brinkburn

The `Brinkburn` was a 3200 ton steamer that sank in 1898. The engine is clearly visible, but Ross and I wanted to find some more seals so headed off of the wreck after a short time. Needless to say that since we were looking for seals, we didn't find any, but six of our group did.

Friday, Dive 2 – The Mando

The Mando was a 7176 ton Panamanian steamship. She was outward bound from Hampton Roads for Rotterdam loaded with coal when on 21 January 1955 she lost her way in thick fog, ran aground on the Golden Ball Bar and quickly became a total loss.

Now most of the Mando lies on a fairly flat rocky shelf. We saw a great deal of scrap metal, however nothing that really was recognisable as a ship. Again we had seals on our mind, so we probably didn't take full advantage of what the wreck could have offered! We ended up swimming through a whole series of gullies with a very strong surge. We had to time our move forward with the surge, aiming for a strong looking bit of kelp and try and grab it and hold on tightly as the surge reversed direction and tried to push us backwards – exciting stuff. With the conditions as they were, we finished the dive by swimming away from the most obvious rocks during our safety stop and then surfaced with some trepidation – hoping that we were sufficiently away from the rocks! Unfortunately this dive also finished without seeing any seals ☹

So that's it for the diving! It just remains to not only thank Phil for organising another fantastic trip, but also for ensuring a week of excellent weather!