

A Bit of a Stink in the Firth of Lorne



KEN FARROW is a well-kent face in Scottish diving circles. A keen deep diver, he uses the Inspiration rebreather and is a regular at the top sites in the north-east and the west coast. Dive shows and conferences rarely pass without Ken and Alison putting in an appearance. Ken is also a valued contributor to *'Scottish DIVER'*. Normally an amiable individual, Ken was in high dudgeon when he contacted the magazine office recently and anxious that we draw a serious environmental issue to the attention of our readership. Ken said:

"Like many divers I have very happy memories of diving the Western coasts of Scotland. Oban served as a starting point for expeditions to St Kilda and Rockall as well as shorter trips exploring the wreck sites along the sound of Mull.

"Slightly less well known is the diving to the south of Oban. There the largest settlement at Easdale looks out over a seascape dotted with a multitude of islands. Below water the seabed is equally attractive with various sea mounts, drop offs and walls while the numerous islands provide for exciting tidal flows. The most dynamic and dramatic water movements are at the Corryreckan or great whirlpool well known even in Viking times. Although the *Helena Falbaums* in 60 metres provides an easy trimix dive and the *Meldon* in about 15 metres provides various photographic opportunities this is not an area that attracts the obsessive wreck divers but is a paradise for marine naturalists.

"Apart from the thrills of drift diving,

the major attractions are scenic dives due to the extensive and varied marine life flourishing in the many rocky gullies, and down the drop offs. Encrusted with soft corals and jewel anemones the rocks are vividly coloured while fish life includes large conger and colourful cuckoo wrasse. Personal experience of diving here goes back some fifteen or twenty years. I can even remember spending one Christmas down here diving with Linda and the late Mike Gilroy from their inflatable (for young readers those were the floppy boats that we used to dive from before RHIBs came along.

"Unsurprisingly a substantial portion of this area forms The Firth of Lorne Special Area of Conservation (SAC) an area of exceptional marine habitat diversity, which is of international conservation importance. With outstanding tide races, complexes of extensive and diverse reef habitats, it is one of the most species rich parts of Western Scotland, with many rare species.

"Amazingly it appears that this is an area suitable for sewage dumping. Not just at one site but at two sites. Imagine the sewage waste from a small town of a mere 20,000 people, i.e. a bigger place than Oban. That is how much sewage that could be delivered to just one site. For this is the amount of waste generated by the salmon from a fish farm producing 1000 tonnes of fish per year.

"Let me explain. Back in 1989 the Crown Estates approved a fish farm of 230 tonnes but while that had hardly been used a large cage complex has recently been installed and consent for an increase to 1000 tonnes is under consideration by the Crown Estates.

"More bad news is that a second possible site has reportedly data gathering current meters in place just east of the ruins of St Brendan's monastery (Scotland's oldest ecclesiastical ruin being founded in AD 542, 21 years before St Columba arrived on Iona).

While appreciating the massive contribution of fish farming to the Scottish economy and the benefits to rural economies these developments appear entirely inappropriate in their siting. What should we expect next, salmon cages in Village Bay, St Kilda?

If you feel strongly about these proposals the people to write to would be: Ian Pritchard, Crown Estate, Fish Farming Estate Manager, 10 Charlotte Square Edinburgh, EH2 4DR & Jane Dodd, Scottish Natural Heritage, Nature Project Officer (Marine), Glencruitten Road, Oban, Argyll, PA34 4DN and Angus Gilmour, Head of Building & Development Control, Argyll & Bute Council, 67 Chalmers St, Ardrishaig, Argyll, PA30 8DX."

As Ken was letting us know about these potential problems in Argyll, local dive boat skipper Dave Ainsley was bringing these unwelcome developments to the attention of the broader public in a big spread in *'Scotland on Sunday'*. For divers who regularly visit this area of unique natural beauty, there is clearly something to worry about. And for the rest of the population, confirmation that the natural habitat in Scotland continues to be threatened by a wide range of pressures.

Main photograph:

A view of the Firth of Lorne (Kevin Watson);

insert: the crawfish -

one of the species under threat.