

Skye Haven For Solway Divers

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Solway Divers are an active club and regular visitors to Scotland's west coast. Last August they escaped foul weather to find blue skies, sunny days and some excellent diving on scenic Skye. Here's their story of a busy Bank Holiday weekend



Dramatic Skye - the island's mysterious brooding beauty makes it a great destination for a short diving trip

MEMBERS OF Solway SAC had a very enjoyable long August weekend on Skye last year. Due to the miserable weather Cumbria and the rest of the UK had been experiencing and with more storms forecast, the group were not optimistic that the visibility and sea state were going to be up to expectations.

Even on the journey north the wind was blowing and rain lashing down until we arrived in the Highlands; the further north and west we headed the better the weather got and we eventually reached the Isle of Skye under

sunny blue skies! Some consolation for the exorbitant fee to use what must be the most expensive toll road in Europe to cross on to the island.

We were booked into 'Dive & Sea The Hebrides' at Stein on the north west of the island and we were greeted by Gordon who runs the centre and shown to our compact accommodation. After the long 8 hour drive we all retreated to the nearby Stein Inn for a pool tournament.

The local jetty is on the doorstep of the dive centre and all we expected to do was get our equipment a few yards down the road and off we go. Alas on the first morning we were told we were to dive the other side of the island and had to get to another jetty 40 minutes drive away. Although we were not really expecting this it worked out well as the drive was very scenic and the girls got to go past Skye Silver to make a few purchases.

The weather did not disappoint on

the first day and neither did the diving; the site was called Oisgil Bay, depth 24 metres along a reef and was a very gentle drift to get us into the weekend. The visibility was 10-15 metres and there was abundant life including conger and dog fish.

After a leisurely lunch sunbathing on the rocks near the pier the wind had got up and the sea was slightly choppy for the second dive at Meanish Reef. This was enjoyable amongst boulders but visibility was not as good as the morning, even so the life was rich and plentiful especially lobsters and octopus.

The boat was *Elena C* and was well fitted out for divers, the entry was relatively easy but getting back up the ladders was a bit of a problem especially for those with short legs. After the first day of enjoyable diving we all retired once more to the Stein Inn where the final matches of the pool tournament were played.

After thinking the weather had broken and with the wind getting worse as the night went on, it was amazing to wake the next day with calm seas and bright sunshine - some were wondering if they were really in Scotland. We decided to dive a wreck so our ever helpful skipper took us to the *Chadwick* lying in 25 metres. This



The lighthouse at Neish Point

can only be dived on slack water so we had a long lie and dived at 10.30. The wreck is broken up but you can make out the large propellers covered in Dead Mans Fingers, the visibility was about 10-12m and loads of life was spotted - congers, ling, lobster and dogfish.

The second dive was at Neish Point under the lighthouse. This was another drift dive along a reef and again marine life was varied with shoals of pollock that seemed to follow us along with the very inquisitive cuckoo wrasse.

That evening was spent in the Lochbay Seafood Restaurant, again just yards from the dive centre; some of the group had their speciality, a four course shell fish platter, which they all highly recommend although it was a bit pricey both in terms of cash and the huge amounts of sea life wiped out for its creation!

The next morning we were all in for a disappointment as the sun was hiding behind the clouds. We had planned to dive at a site west of the island but due to one of our group forgetting their dry suit (Margaret, who shall remain nameless) we had to go back to shore and do a dive at Lochbay Pinnacle, just 5 minutes from the pier. This rose from the sea bed at



Unloading at Coral Beach

20m, to 5m below the surface like an upside down ice cream cone. Although the visibility was not as good as previous dives, due to a fish farm further up the bay, some thought it the best site of the weekend with loads of life as usual.

We were then taken to Coral Beach where we explored the hills and saw more magnificent views. The last dive

of the weekend was at Clett Island and this was fairly shallow site with visibility back to normal at 10-12 metres.

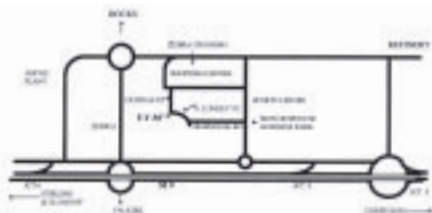
A very enjoyable weekend was had by all, we had no rain whatsoever but we did know we were in Scotland due to those bloody midges!!!

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