



Virtually Diving At Macduff

by LILIAS PARKS, Grampian ScotSAC

THE SEASEARCH Surveyor course is run in Scotland by the Marine Conservation Society to follow on from the simpler Observer stage. It is a great opportunity to add to the basic observations and recordings, giving a more detailed picture of the seabed and seas around our coastline.

A SURVEYOR course for eight was organised by Marion Perutz and Calum Duncan to be held in Macduff Community Centre in March. Marion's full-time PhD studies took her to Shetland at the time of the course so Calum instructed.

The original plan was to learn about Seasearch Surveyor theory on Saturday followed on Sunday by practical diving work using the skills learned the previous day. Well that was the theory anyway but as usual with any activity depending on the vagaries of the weather then the best laid plans etc.

A 'dry' run

Saturday was an interesting day with plenty of information to get us thinking. Calum explained how the information that we gathered could help in decision-making about the issues concerning the seas around Scotland, interspersed by coffee breaks. In the afternoon we had a couple of dry runs where we watched a video of divers moving over a sea bed showing all the details such as the small and the not so small life, the seaweeds and the actual seabed itself. While the video was playing we made notes and recorded details of what we were viewing to help complete the Survey forms. This simulation helped

prepare us for what we would do while on an actual dive. Suddenly a lot more detail had to be added and more in depth information had to be recorded than we might previously have done.

At 5.30 we called it a day. It had been an informative, interesting and enjoyable day but it was time to stop. One or two people were staying in Macduff and the rest of us headed for home.

Weather to dive?

Sunday and the intended practise in the water but the weather had other ideas. We all gathered at the Macduff Marine Aquarium and looked over the wall to the proposed dive site but although overhead the sun was making an effort there was a big swell running which would manifest itself about every seventh wave in a great rush of white surf. Not really a day to be trying to record information with any detail or accuracy.

Despite Calum's optimism diving did not look like an option. We even had a group of divers who had been going to dive another site that we might have used call us to say that it was a waste of time and to forget the idea. So it was back to the Centre for some coffee, more information and instead of actual diving we had another shot at the virtual stuff and another chance to fill in the forms. It did not get any easier but Calum was on hand to patiently explain the bits that we were less happy with.

Macro to micro

We had rather a pleasant ending to the day as George Brown, one of the folk

on the course and an ardent photographer with Inverness Sub-Aqua Club had samples of work on his laptop and was happy to show these. The one of the Peacock worm and its minute tube-building crustacean companion was a marvel.

A trip to the marvellous Macduff Aquarium provided some more virtual field study. As well as the large-scale scenic splendour, there is an amazingly minute and fascinating world out there. But then these are the reasons that we dive in the first place are they not?

This was a good weekend despite the lack of in-water stuff, and Calum did a great job. The next task is to continue to fill in the forms on a regular basis so as gradually the areas on the east coast and on the Moray coast can yield valuable information about how they look, the state that they are in and what life can be found there.

Seasearch dives from Pentland Skerries to Troup Head to Stonehaven have since taken place in 2005, greatly adding to our limited seabed knowledge for this least surveyed of Scotland's 16,000km coastline. Thanks Calum for all your hard work and, although she could not help on the course helped set it up, to Marion.

If you want to get involved with Seasearch, please contact MCS Scottish Officer Calum Duncan on 0131 226 6360 or email scotland@mcsuk.org. In northeast Scotland, you can contact local co-ordinator Marion Perutz at seasearch_nescotland@yahoo.co.uk and in the west of Scotland, west coast Seasearch co-ordinator Owen Paisley at seasearch.west@btinternet.com.



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