



What's The Story, Tobermory

Ken Farrow avoids the temptation to tell us that nostalgia isn't what it used to be. In fact he provides some very good reasons to return to the sound of Mull and says divers who haven't made the obligatory trip - must; not only for the superb diving but also for some sparkling memories in 20 years time ...

IF YOU have the memories, nostalgia is something to revel in. The way we were, those glorious days. If you are just starting diving, treasure your memories; keep notes, a log book and maybe a diary. You have the delights of nostalgia to look forward too.

It was only 1980 when I first discovered the attractions of the Sound of Mull. Most previous diving had been down in that southern place, England, out of Plymouth, Penzance, the Scillies and the Isle of Man. Like everyone else my diving interests have changed and developed. Seafood, recycling and reduction in marine heavy metal pollution (oh how we divers were ahead of the times back then), photography and video, 8mm, high 8 then eventually three chip digital.

In the process I avoided some diving diseases, such as DOD (Diving officers disease) and ROTDG (Rapture of the depth gauge) as investigated by Dr, later

superiority often involving having already bought the tee shirt! However unlike many sufferers I eventually recovered from Been Their Done That syndrome, though I still have tee shirts from Truk (now Chuuk), Rockall and a fleece from St Kilda.

It was diving out in St Kilda that brought on the first symptoms. Returning from trips to explore those vertical cliff faces decorated with tapestries of multicoloured jewel anemones in oceanic blue had a terrible effect. On the return journey nobody wanted to dive in the green tinted waters of the Sound of Mull. At the peak of the affliction I can remember emerging from a dive on the *Hispania* and saying something akin to 'well if I never dive that again it will be no bad thing'.

What brought on the recovery isn't clear but it might be a side effect of nitrox, helium gas mixes, or the effects of breathing 80+% oxygen from an Inspiration rebreather whilst on the surface waiting to be collected by the boat. Following recovery from BTDT I've been able to go back to the Sound of Mull and enjoy the diving.

For this year's long weekend trip we were collected from Oban early on Saturday; that is a few hours' drive down from Aberdeen around which all of the party are based. For some of us that meant an overnight stay. Surprisingly Oban appeared to be full and those of us lucky enough to find somewhere, and avoid an early morning drive, were out at places like Connel. It would appear that Oban at least is doing well out of the tourist trade.

Loaded on to the *Diving Belle* it was then a cruise from Oban, the ruined castle looming out of its tree girt crag, then off up to the *Breda*, one of the area's favourite wrecks. After a splendid dive untroubled by other dive boats we then enjoyed the sight of Dunvegan Castle dominating the sound as odd shafts of sunlight pierced the low cloud and soft mist. For anyone lucky enough to take part in one of the archaeological dives or tours on the adjacent *Swan* I would recommend

Professor, Warronek from Warsaw and Gdansk. Unfortunately I was smitten, like many before, and others since, by BTDT syndrome.

BTDT is not a just a condition in which you ramble on the phone in drunken stupor but instead a sort of moral

bringing a camera to photograph the castle.

Not having chartered a liveaboard, our base for the weekend was Tobermory, or for the young at heart or indeed for parents lucky enough to still go diving - Balamory! However we first of all visited Lochaline where the dive centre provided a marvellous service in supplying air, nitrox and for those with rebreathers, oxygen. For those keen to enjoy a snack, the one time burger van has been converted into an attractive chalet with tourist information.

Our accommodation in Tobermory was up the hill past the distillery where the rooms were great, the folk most helpful and the breakfasts splendid. However much as Oban was full Tobermory seemed to have benefited from the Balamory effect and the days of inexpensive B&B seem to have long gone.

The weather conspired against us getting outside the Sound of Mull but we were still left with a large number of dive site options and when the air station in Tobermory had problems we once again returned to Lochaline for gases.

Most of our diving was on wrecks but we also explored the upper reaches of the deep wall on Calve Island, which shelters the Tobermory anchorage. Back in the days of air that was offered a near unattainable (well for anyone with common sense) 200 foot plus (60 metre plus) dive. Now on an Inspiration that would merely have been a case of swapping a three litre side mount of air diluent for a seven litre side mount of 50:50 helium:air mix and a different decompression plan.

Other wreck sites visited included the *Shuna*, where I believe the adjacent fish farm contributes to the less than sparkling visibility; the *Hispania*, as impressive as ever and still with rubber bales in the holds; and the *Thesis*.

Some might say I had a relapse of BTDT since I didn't do all the dives. However that was a photographic affliction. With a current penchant for available light photography, overcast gloomy days do not make for the best of photographs. As a result I still remember the *Thesis* as a colourful framework with sun dappled sand and shingle, covered in colourful marine life.

Sadly I suspect I may now be suffering from another ailment, one that seemed to have escaped Prof Warrofnok's work on diving diseases, PNT. Proud Not Too in my case seems to be based on never having dived in Stoney Cove and being proud of it, together with never having had a holiday in Majorca or Spain. Both claims that even the Heir to the Throne and President of the BSAC cannot match, although his holidays in Spain have been with the King of Spain.

However the Sound of Mull is well worth a weekend or more for a diving trip. If you've never been, do go. If you used to dive there, it's well worth a return visit, for the nostalgia and the good diving.



Will it be like I remember?