

Escape To Scapa

The guys at Eastwood SAC usually arrange a couple of decent trips each year. This time they report from Scapa Flow where Dougie on MV *Sunrise* looked after them for a week. The programme included some varied wreck dives and, of course, some of the highlights of what remains of the German Grand Fleet ...



WORDS/PICTURES

ALEX GRAY

SUNDAY MORNING we rose to dive the *Kronprinz Wilhelm*. It was quite refreshing diving a wreck and seeing things that look wreck-like in the 10m plus visibility, rather than the delights that the Clyde has to offer.

Anyway, we descended the shot-line on to the stern. Whilst everyone else went on and saw the guns, watchtowers and the crow's nest, myself, Lynsey and Martin decided to bumble about and came across a sort of swim-through - a massive big hole with amazing shafts of green light. What we saw of this wreck was simply phenomenal, but far too massive to properly appreciate on one dive. As well as being a great wreck, there was also quite an amount of life on it, Ballan and Cuckoo Wrasse, great big

Saithe, and a nice Ling. Finally though we ran out of air and had to return to the world above the waves.

After a pleasant surface interval, and a spot of lunch (made by Teri our surrogate mum for the week), we were once again descending the shot line, though this time onto the *Brummer*. Once again we had amazing 10m plus visibility. There was hundreds of life on the wreck, with shoals of small silver fish. The *Brummer* lies on its side, allowing you to get a good look at the 5.9 inch guns which are very impressive.

After a night of socialising with the locals, we were up on Monday, heading for the Hoxa Sound to dive the *James Barrie*, a trawler that sank years ago and has a lot of life growing on all her surfaces, as well as lots swimming around inside her.

The light on the wreck was really eerie, giving it a ghostly appearance at times. From a photography point of view, there was far too much 'big stuff' floating in the water, so I tried taking long exposure black and white photos of the wreck without any flash. These came out reasonably well, a bit blurred because holding a camera still for that amount of time is nigh on impossible without a tripod, but not bad all the same.

Monday afternoon and we

decided to do a scenic dive on Cobinsay, which is essentially a shallow wall dive, with some big holes, or small caves, depending on your outlook. There were thousands of anemones, of all different sorts, carpeting the seabed as well as lobsters, crabs, and - my favourite fish in British waters - the Short Spined Sea Scorpion.

Tuesday morning we dived the *Elegance*; this trawler had only been down for around one and a half years and is not by any standards a large wreck, but on account of its relative newness to the bottom of the sea, it has a huge amount to see. There are still seats in the wheelhouse, nets draped over the booms and fire hoses lying about; all of which add to the strange sensation that there still ought to be people working on the deck.

My only criticism of this dive is that there were too many of us on the wreck, making it impossible to move anywhere without seeing other divers. Still, it is very much a dive I would recommend to small parties, as there is so much to see. Because it has been under the water for a comparatively short period of time, there is not much encrustation on her, but there was quite a bit of life, with all the usual varieties of fish.

For the afternoon we dived a boom defence vessel, called *The Endeavour*, which was a great wee boat. She is about the same size as *Elegance* but is really easy to penetrate, as she's been under the



MV Sunrise - one of Scapa's top boat charters

water for longer. Again there were massive amounts of life and Lynsey saw a lovely nudibranch. I, however, saw what must be the most pathetic crab known to man, a *phylum pycnogonida*. It is in fact so insignificant that no one has ever bothered to give it a common name hence the Latin. It was essentially six tiny stick legs, stuck onto a tiny stick body. In total about an inch across; unless you are into marine biology I would not recommend looking out for these.

Wednesday we decided to have a half-day off to allow us to de-gas. So in the morning we dived the *Disperser*, a salvage trawler. She was of a similar size to the previous two ex-trawlers, but was more broken up, allowing a lot more access.

Thursday saw us back in the water, on the wreck of the *SMS Markgraf*. This is another one of the massive battleships, where you really need more time to appreciate



lynsey dives one of the wrecks

lies on a seabed of about 45m, it's hard to get a sense of the enormity of the vessel - especially if you're diving on air (as we were). We wanted a minimum penalty for the afternoon so spent only 28 minutes in the water before we were back on the boat, and heading for the *SMS Köln*.

The *Köln* is another great dive; we had a maximum depth of 34m which meant we had a reasonable amount of time to explore the wreck and seek out her guns. For people who aren't excited by guns and wreckage, there's a huge amount of life on this wreck too.

The last day's diving saw us on two fantastic dive sites... the *Tabarka*, and the *F2* and *YC21*. In

the morning the *Tabarka* is very much restricted by tides. Standing on deck on the way there we could see whirlpools and such on the surface of the water. However thanks to the skill of our very safety-conscious skipper we dropped into the water the minute the tide stopped running, to give us a maximum bottom time.

In the afternoon we dived the *F2* and *YC21*, which were an escort vessel and barge respectively. The *YC21* was intended to recover parts from the *F2*, but it sank!

As we neared the end of the rope between the two wrecks we came across two divers who were evidently far more serious than us! I can only hope they were training, as bearing in mind this was a 17m dive, they had twin sets (no bad thing) and side-slings (just silly).

After 65 minutes in the water it was time, once again, to return to reality. I shall just mention though that on the 62nd minute of this dive, my dive buddy for the week, Lynsey, reached her 100th hour under water!

So that was it, back on the boat, into harbour, sorted our kit, packed our bags and headed home. A massive thank you to Ian for organising, Teri for feeding us, and every one else for making it a great trip.



colourful cuckoo wrasse

it. Dropping onto her mid-ship, there is a large opening in the hull that had a bit of life in it, but there wasn't much recognisable in the way of wreckly things. As she



sea scorpion

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