



orange fish

Beneath Scotland's Waters

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Tired of being quizzed at what exactly there is to look at when diving in Scotland, Alan Lissimore, armed with his brand new underwater camera embarked on a mission to show non-divers what they are missing out on beneath Scotland's waters...



pink anemone



crabs eyes



cream anemone



lobster on rock



small fish

WE'VE all been asked: "So you do 'Deep Sea Diving'..... on oxygen tanks?" To which we duly reply, "Well scuba diving and it's only air"

This seems to fall short of any technical understanding and is quickly followed by, "...and do you see sharks? Well not in Scotland, but there is a lot to see. "Yeah - sure" Anyway - it got me thinking, what can you see?

I have recently bought an underwater camera and began the long road to getting some pictures that were more than a few dark shapes against a dark, silty seabed. The cost of this kit meant that my dive buddy would have to sacrifice a few dives in order to get a part time job... no wonder she resents the damn thing!

The first successful trip ie the thing didn't flood, was to Greenends Gully, near Eyemouth. A short drive down the A1 from Edinburgh and a wee 'off road' bit sees you at the dive site. Four or five cars can park on the small road leading down to the concrete slip. Walking to the entry point in full kit can be hard, not too long a walk here though. Once in the water and after the 100th check that all the housing clasps are firmly shut, you drop a few metres to get out of any swell. Vis can range from 1m to 10m, which is typical of Scottish waters. Today we were lucky.

Underwater, kelp forests give way to rock bottom and a reasonable amount of life. Starfish of various colours and size, sea urchins with their tentacles flowing in the current, anemones in vivid colours, Hermit and Velvet crab make an interesting sideshow.

The rocks are covered with Deadmen's Fingers, Plumose Anemones and a carpet of Brittle Stars. The wee nooks and crannies are well worth a poke around, sometimes the smaller life gets overlooked.

The dive involves making a zig-zag line in and out of a series of gullies which run like fingers from the shore, depth hits a maximum of around 11m, so it's not a hard dive. Trainees can also use a fairly sheltered pool area nearby. Getting back to the same gully is not always easy since they all look the same and I never did manage to figure out compasses. Get it wrong and you have a long walk back to the car over some serious terrain. Amazing how those who claim to be able to use a compass still get it wrong but never admit it, they claim they exited here to see some rare wildlife or fauna.

Back on shore, it's time to pack up and rinse down the camera; the thing takes a wee bit of looking after, as does my buddy,

although a chippie on the way home suffices in her case!

The second trip was a day boat dive to the Isle of May in the Firth of Forth. A few of us had elected to camp over the night before and so were displaying all the effects of over indulgence. The gods of the sea must have known this, as they sent a fair old swell.

Fortunately the island offered shelter as the sun broke through the clouds - Scotland at its best. We had planned to dive the wreck of the *Primrose* but it appeared that someone had moved it, so we settled for two scenic dives.

Again, vis was in the region of six metres. Starfish, Brittle Stars and crab all featured. A large Sun-star was clearly seen, bright red against the dark bottom.

A couple of lobsters of different breeds were also seen, one unlucky enough to be caught in a pot. Towards the end of the dive, we came upon several Wrasse, some of which became very confident and eventually ended up posing for the camera.

Once back on the boat everyone tucks into tea, coffee and biccies whilst you take care of your beloved - rinsing her out in fresh water before carefully storing her back in the case!

The final dive of the year which yielded some good pics was Furnace Quarry up beyond Inverary. We set off in convoy at some really early time in the morning, all looked well until Harthill on the M8 where the skies darkened and the rain started - why does this always happen here? Finally after passing some of the most impressive scenery in Scotland (albeit shrouded in mist) we arrived at the site. Furnace is a teeny wee village with a huge stone quarry nearby. It is here that you can dive or fish.

After realising that we had parked in a six inch deep puddle of muddy water, we kitted up and made our way past the fishermen to enter the water at the side of a concrete pier.

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It is a relatively easy entry compared to jumping from the main wooden pier. Once bitten twice shy!

We elected not to go in search of the little wreck which lies around 40m and just swim across to the wooden pier and back. At five metres my buddy's fin clip broke so she surfaced, and enticed by thoughts of hot chocolate and a dry, warm car decided to abandon any further attempt at diving.

The remaining two then set off, dropping down the slope to around 30m, lots of boulders provide excellent hiding holes for the usual assortment of life. I wanted to get a good macro shot of a squat lobster but this proved difficult as they retreated as soon as the focus light was shone on them. A few pics of dark holes proved frustrating!

As we swam, I noticed my buddy was preoccupied with releasing a crab which had become entangled in fishing line. I thought it improper to get his picture and that I better offer some assistance. Not easy to cut masses of fishing line whilst holding a camera, torch and avoid stabbing either the crab or buddy's hand. Eventually we managed and set the crab free, he didn't even hang around to get his picture taken.

Near the pier a lone sunstar was spotted, it was whilst trying to take his pic that I realised that I had a setting wrong on the camera. Better not let that one out, was my immediate reaction - why give them more ammo to hate the thing!

Another crab was discovered in a similar state of distress, this time no amount of cutting could free it and my animal loving buddy decided that a rescue was in order, off she swam for the remainder of the dive with crab in hand.

A nice pink anemone was found as we returned to the exit point, the pictures would be usable but at a lower quality I convinced myself!

Once out of the water, we trudged back to see my partner all warm and contented in the car, which when combined with the biting cold wind made us decide not to go back in for a second dive.

After de-kitting we set about freeing the rescued crab - a lot of careful cutting with numb hands and we were finally able to release him back into the water. Not from the top of the wooden pier either!

A long drive home (sunshine after Harthill), and it was once again time to download the pictures. When you review them (no matter what quality they are) it does make you realise that there is a lot to see in Scottish waters - when you go "Deep Sea Diving on Oxygen!"