

colonial ascidian



light bulb tunicate

A LOVELY day saw us throwing our dive kit into the back of the vans before carefully loading our drinks supply; which I think rivalled Sainsbury's Beers, Wines and Spirits department. Eddie and Brian would be the chauffeurs, as 9 members of Pentland Sub-Aqua Club left for the Isle of Skye, for a weekend of carefully planned diving and socialising, at least that was how Keith (Expedition Organiser) had billed it.

At junction 1 on the M9 we saw the lead van exit; Brian was following his new Satellite Navigation System ... technology eh? Just a smidgen over five hours saw both vans crossing the famous (and now toll free) Skye Bridge and park up outside our SYHA accommodation. Brian had toured most of Scotland but had 'made up ground' as he put it. His state of the art Navigation System was still telling him to do a 'U' turn and head back to Edinburgh!

After a wee bit of logistical organisation to put all the snorers (you know who you are!) in the same room we headed off to the local. A bit of grub was then followed up by a few drinks before retiring for the night - back to one of the rooms

for a nightcap. 2am saw the finish of this nightcap and we settled down into our bunks for a night of sound sleep!

Getting up at 8am was a chore but Keith's bacon rolls softened the blow. A few coffees later and we set off for the dive boat which was only a five minute drive down the road. Our skipper for the weekend was Neil McRae. Kit on board, we set off for *HMS Port Napier*.

At 9600 tons and 498 ft, she was originally intended to sail as a cargo ship. The outbreak of World War II in 1940 saw her requisitioned for the war effort and converted into a mine layer. On the night of November 27, 1940, as *HMS Port Napier* was being loaded with 550 tonnes of mines and 60,000 rounds of ammunition, a fire broke out on board.

Fearing for the safety of the crew and habitants of Kyle, it was decided to tow the boat out into the loch. About one mile from Kyleakin, an explosion erupted which sent the boat to the sea bed. She lay there for the remainder of the war years before the Royal Navy removed her mines to make safe the wreck in 1950.

The wreck sits on its starboard side; the

first dive dropped us in on the bow, which sits just below the surface at all but high tide. Working through the kelp forest, we were greeted with the impressive wooden deck falling to the seabed some 20m below. As a relatively shallow dive we could afford to take our time, trying to work out what was what.

There are two guns forward of the superstructure, the lower quite impressive silhouetted against the surface. A small gauge 'railway' system was fitted to allow the deployment of the mines on trolleys. A couple of the group chose to enter the hold area and follow these rails through the innards.

The wreck was covered in fine silt but was well populated with anemones, dead men's fingers and lobsters. We got 45 minutes of exploration before surfacing and returning to base for a bit of lunch and a wee nap (a sign of old age methinks).

The second dive saw us drop down on the stern; most of the group preferred this dive, perhaps as a result of knowing the wreck a little bit better or as a result of the nap! Winches, doorways, port-holes and walkways were all explored.

A weekend club trip to Syke provided some excellent wreck diving for Pentland SAC. The underwater life didn't disappoint nor the above water rest and relaxation ...

Great Views On Skye Dive

words & pictures
ALAN LISSIMORE



nudibranch

An intact handrail and crows nest were also of interest. Scattered around the seabed were several of the trolleys used to dispatch the mines, including the wire cables which would both anchor the mine at a predetermined depth and trigger the arming mechanism.

Back on dry land we showered before returning to the local for some food and MORE beer. A local band provided the entertainment; backed up with a stunning sunset over the Skye Bridge. Midnight saw us turn in for an early night ... we definitely can't handle two nights on the trot!

Sunday, and we were up and ready once more for 8am - why does no one in diving like a long lie? Today we had decided on Ru Scarabhaig, a scenic wall dive which was approximately one hour sail from the harbour. Dropping in we were greeted with a spectacular wall full of colour and life. I had the camera and my buddy (or 'Photographic Assistant' as she now likes to be called - I knew she would come to love that camera! - was more than happy to spot interesting things for me to photograph.

Lobster, anemones, nudibranchs and various tunicates all made interesting subjects. The wall dropped to 40m but we only managed 20m as a result of there being enough to see where we were. A wee blenny caught my eye and took up several minutes getting his photo taken.

A large leopard goby allowed me to approach; I have previously found these things difficult to photograph at close range, due to their flighty nature. As I positioned the camera and twiddled a few knobs (more for effect than actually knowing what I was doing) I inadvertently touched the wall and kicked up a huge plume of silt - I swear I saw a smile on his face before he darted off!

Before long it was time to ascend slowly up the wall, more pics on the way - must buy a larger memory card - need to figure out a way to hide that one on the credit card first though! Back on the boat we headed back to base with the intention of making our final dive on the *Harvester*, a small fishing boat which is fairly broken in approximately 10m of water.

Unfortunately only two of the group

found the wreck; my buddy and I were not those two! We swam around for 20 minutes before deciding that we had well and truly missed it and since there was little else to see we decided to get our backsides back on the boat for the first shot at the biccies. Unfortunately, all the others who had also missed the wreck had the same idea - I never did get a Hob-Nob with my coffee.

Vans loaded, we set off for home, Brian still had faith in his Sat Nav system, despite the ribbing he had received over the weekend; would we ever see him again, more importantly would we ever see our kit again?




Those on the trip were - Keith Morris, Brian Lyell, Eddie Fraser, Hugh Fraser, Marion Fraser, Alan Lissimore, Karen McPherson, Steve Taylor, Kevin Watson and Dan Holland (Ullapool SAC). Thanks to Keith for his organisational efforts, whisky and bacon rolls; Brian for the entertainment (swears he never normally drinks!) and transport; Eddie for the luxury transport (leather seats); and Ian McRae for being our skipper (01599577230).

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