



One Fyne Day

Editor Jack Morrison put aside his passport and made the short journey to Loch Fyne. There he placed himself in the hands of Malcolm Fairchild, skipper of *Little Blue*. Malcolm provided the sites and Jack caught the underwater action. They proved quite a combination ...

**words & photos
Jack Morrison**

THE SKY is blue, the sea is blue and the boat is called *Little Blue*. It's a beautiful morning as we leave Tarbert harbour and head out into the calm waters of Loch Fyne. Once again I am a paying guest of West Lothian Branch, the friendliest branch in ScotSAC, no they aren't paying me to say that but if I don't they might not ask me back.

Malcolm the skipper of *Little Blue* said the first dive of the day would be the Gardens, sometimes called Neptune's Garden and sometimes called Duncan's Gardens. Perhaps Duncan is Neptune I don't know but it is one of my favourite dives in Loch Fyne.

On a calm day like this it only took half an hour to get there and as we were getting kitted up and ready, Malcolm did a bit of fishing and pulled out a few mackerel. The Garden is a reef just offshore from Portavadie reaching up to within 12m of the surface and dropping to about 30m on the west side. If the visibility is as good as it usually is you can see it from the surface - why it's called the Garden

The smooth rolling rocks that form this reef are covered in large plumose anemones. They are the tallest anemones I have seen and are white, orange, green

and brown. Around their base the bottom is covered in brittle stars with the occasional cushion star adding a touch of bright red to the scene. Deep crevices are cut into the rocks and here you will find large edible crabs, squat lobsters and northern prawns.

The usual cast of leopard spotted gobies, goldsinny, dogfish and cuckoo wrasse make up the fishlife with occasional sightings of red gurnard (I've seen one, once). Plumose are not the only anemones found here, there are also large red dahlia and even the odd bolocera, its peachy-white tentacles bending in the tide, and of course dead mens fingers. Between the rocks there are sand chutes where you can find small flat fish and the occasional scallop, although they are pretty rare here even at the base of the reef.

Back on board and one of the best things about *Little Blue* - as soon as you are on deck you are handed a cup of tea or coffee, great service. The first dive over we motor slowly back across the loch to our second dive site close to a fish farm and called Ivy Cliff. I can't see a cliff and I can't see any ivy but I wasn't paying too much attention so it may be that I am completely wrong or it could be

that the site was discovered by Ivy and Cliff (whoever they are). Doesn't really matter to me as I don't fill in a log book!

We have a bit of time to wait before we can dive again and that gives me time to talk to Malcolm about his charter business and how he has just become IDEST accredited for testing cylinders. Any club or group with 10 or more cylinders should contact Malcolm to see what special offer he can arrange for them. His aim is to turn cylinders around in a week, and for customers diving with him he will offer them a spare cylinder and do his best to have their cylinders tested over the weekend (details of his services and prices are at the end).

Then the sun reappears, shining from a clear blue sky and it's time to dive again. This reef is about 200m from the shore and is only 12m to the top, similar to the last reef but a little less scenic and more spread out. There are rolling flat rocks and big boulder type rocks with edible crabs hiding under them, at least one lobster was spotted and quite a few congers. Fewer anemones but more sponges, light bulb tunicates and Devonshire cup corals.

Altogether a lower energy site than the first one, which for me emphasises the incredible variety to be found in this remarkable loch. Hardly time for a quick cuppa and we're back in Tarbert Harbour to the sound of loud live music. We have chosen the weekend of the Tarbert Seafood Festival and are coming ashore just in time to hear the MacDonald Brothers from X Factor getting warmed up. Maybe we're not music lovers or maybe we are, but I've never seen dive gear packed away so quickly and cars drive off with such unseemly haste.

Later some of us stop at the Quarry Tearooms for coffee and a bit of Aileen's excellent home baking. It is agreed we have had another great day's diving from *Little Blue* with skipper Malcolm Goodchild. No matter what the weather is like Malcolm will always try to get you two good dives, he has a wealth of knowledge of the diving at this end of the loch - both shallow and deep. He was telling us he has a group of technical divers coming up soon to dive a submarine lying in 100m. He is very friendly and has the biggest collection of politically incorrect (but hilariously funny) jokes you could imagine. Suffice to say diving with Malcolm off *MV Little Blue* is a piece of cake.

For more information on diving with *MV Little Blue* visit www.fyne-diving.co.uk

continued on Page 22



Metridium plumose anemones provide a ghostly underwater architecture



Excuse me - I'm having my lunch! Starfish finds the crab to his satisfaction



Bolacera anemone



edible crab and anemones



One Fyne Day

continued from Page 21

SERVICES FROM FYNE DIVING CHARTERS

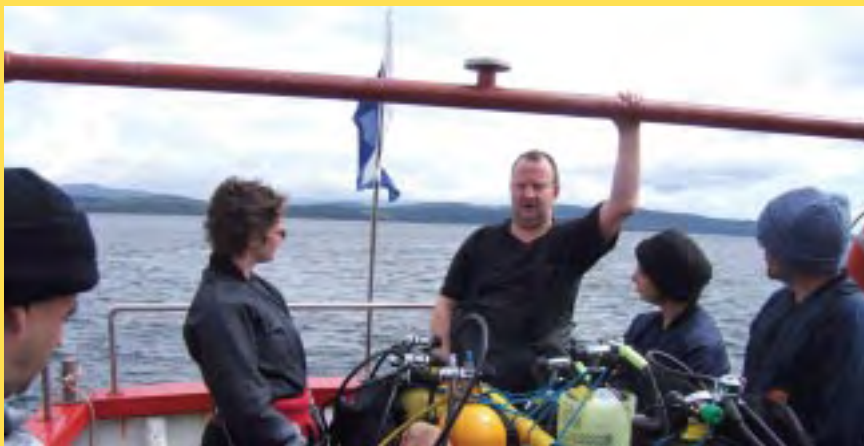
Hydraulic Test	£30
(including a valve service and air fill)	
Internal blast clean	£15
Visual Test	£25
(including a valve service and air fill)	
Replacement valve	£26.50
Valve service	£5 + parts
O2clean	£22

Loch Fyne Dive Charters is certified by the Inspectorate for Diving Equipment Servicing and Testing (IDEST) Test Station No 6A/1 enabling them to undertake cylinder testing to BS EN 1802/1968:2002

At Loch Fyne Dive Charters they have two compressors offering air and enriched air nitrox fills to a maximum of 300 bar. With two large air banks and six filling whips available, waiting times are kept to a minimum. All air is either double or - for nitrox fills - triple-filtered and is tested regularly for impurities so you can be sure you'll always get a fill of high quality.

For nitrox fills they have a blending system using a booster pump. For rebreather divers, air diluent and high pressure oxygen to a maximum of 300 bar is also available.

PLEASE NOTE - In order to purchase enriched air nitrox fills, your cylinders must have been oxygen cleaned within the last 12 months. You must also present a training certification card appropriate for the required gas. If in doubt, call Loch Fyne Dive Charters.



Martin holds court



Little Blue is here; where did the blue sky go