

A Year In The Life

A last minute holiday to the Red Sea introduced Michael Plane to the delights of scuba diving. Back in Cumbria, Michael decided to continue with this new sport and headed for Carlisle SAC. That was 12 months ago ...

BRANCHLINES



TEN YEARS ago I did a 'Try Dive' in my local school swimming pool, and frankly didn't get it! The various life-forms at the bottom of the pool, and dicky low-pressure inflate valve on the BCD (which kept self-inflating!) didn't really 'float my boat' (though the BCD did float me as I was unable to submerge!).

However, all those documentaries showing this unearthly world beneath the waves still kept me interested, and last year, after a particularly busy spell at work, and with a small bonus on offer, my colleague, his partner and I decided we would all like to visit the Red Sea and learn to scuba dive – we all needed some time out and some early season sunshine, and the Explorers' package with Ocean College was such good value (or cheap!) that, if we decided that we didn't like the diving, a good break could still be had.

So off we went. Once again, when we got into the pool, having had the first couple of 'whatever you do don't hold your breath' lectures, it took some time to click (even just breathing and taking the mask off was quite an ordeal) - I certainly was not a natural. However, come day three and suddenly I was mastering buoyancy control and able to float, neutrally buoyant, in mid-water, somersault, and so on - wow, this was good stuff!

Then came day four - and after the early morning exam, the first boat dive. I was terrified, but excited with anticipation as well. The stride off the boat into the crystal clear water, and the swim to Ras Katy was amazing. Everything was new, and wonderous. The colours were incredible. It was like being a toddler again, where around every turn was a new sight. The next dive, over the fan corals through the arch at Ras

Temple, was even more amazing - though with all this excitement I was gulping air.

Having had such a great time, I thought to myself that it would be good to give it a go and see what UK diving was like, and combined a camper-van trip up the west coast of Scotland with a stay at my friends' place near Oban and a weekend's PADI dry-suit course with Puffin. Again, amazing stuff, even though we just dived off the pontoon and around the bay area - the kelp, starfish, miniscule life-forms - and not THAT cold afterall. Even the viz was good.

After all this excitement I contacted the Carlisle Sub-Aqua Club and joined them for the last pool session of the season, in July. They all seemed very friendly - and invited me to the club BBQ in August. Appropriately enough dry-suits would have been the most appropriate attire! It is the sub-aqua club after all, so I guess you need to have some water at club events!

September brought the new training season, and a number of new recruits, including Henry from over the border who joined me in doing the PADI cross-over. Time to reacquaint myself with the bottom of that school pool - to this day I am sure that there is an eel of some sort living in that huge crack in the grouting at the bottom of the shallow-end! Time will tell ...

Henry braved the depths of Crummock Water a couple of weeks before me, but one wild, wet and windy day (yes there was spray and there were breakers on the shore of the lake ...) in early March I did my first open water dive with the club. Apparently as we rounded the curve in the road and got our first look of the lake I went very quiet and turned a little pale...

Fortunately, the dive site at Hawse Point is sheltered and the waters were calm. However, it was quite a contrast to a boat dive off Sharm el Sheikh as the wind blew the rain into the car soaking everything inside. By the time we had finished I am sure that we could have dived inside the car. And the waters were a positively balmy 6 degrees! However, as the months have gone on I have developed a real love of this place - the cliff face is stunning, and on a sunny day when the daylight beams down from above there are few better places to be at 20m.

In April I 'acted' as trainee during Branch Instructor assessments - congratulations to Jim and David. May brought my first salt-water dive with the club at Loch Long. It was quite an expedition, with base-camp established in the lay-by on the loch shore in Jim and Sue's camper-van. Unfortunately the weather was against us - as I recall a gale was blowing and it snowed - however, once again the hardy ScotSAC spirit prevailed and we all enjoyed an amazing couple of dives in 12 degree waters, spotting conger eels, a swimming scallop (quite a sight!), pollack, blennys, Squat Lobster and Ballan Wrasse. My log book records weighting including two rocks ... Jeff, despite the driving snow and sleet, cooked up a beach barbeque - I believe there are pictures somewhere of us all huddled in the shelter of the sea wall in our drysuits, woolly hats and sheltering under straining golf umbrellas!

A couple of weeks later and my first RIB dive - we had chartered the Aquastars' boat out of Eyemouth harbour. The staff at the dive centre were fantastic - incredibly helpful and friendly, with wonderful facilities, and, as the weather was pretty wild, and sea state rough, and two of our party

This was one of the most amazing experiences of my life - within the caves themselves were tiny comb and moon jellyfish - the lights passing though the tiny combs were like nothing I have ever seen before and I will treasure that memory forever.



We got to some brilliant places - Wastwater (left) and Eyemouth (right)

of four were trainees, we dived in the shelter of the cliffs at Burnmouth Cave.

This was one of the most amazing experiences of my life - within the caves themselves were tiny comb and moon jellyfish - the lights passing through the tiny combs were like nothing I have ever seen before and I will treasure that memory forever. Swimming out onto the reef was stunning - crabs, lobster, superb kelp, dead man's fingers and sea urchins, pipefish, anemones, nudibranch, and spider crabs.

In the afternoon we dived the Cauldrons - completing my compass course and swimming through the beautiful arch covered with dead mens fingers and sea anemones. Despite the temperature of 9 degrees the viz was superb and frankly I enjoyed it every bit as much as diving in the Red Sea - in fact, something about not seeing for miles and focussing your attention on your more immediate surroundings somehow means you actually see more.

Whilst surfacing with Jim, and doing our safety stop, we encountered a shoal of, I think, around one hundred pollack glistening silver in the light filtering down from the

surface. Driving back home, south along the A1 towards Berwick the view down the coast was so clear - taking in the Farnes, Lindisfarne, Bamburgh and the vast stretches of golden yellow sands of the Northumbrian coast.

Into June and training dives at Capenwray in Lancashire. In the morning I dived with David - and, yes, we did see the Sturgeon, as well as various old, now quite collectable, Fords and the helicopter. During the afternoon, a full navigation with Jim C around the quarry, finding everything we set out to find, and practicing a shared ascent. Finally, a calm, warm and sunny day!

June also brought the annual club trip to the Red Sea - qualified divers only, so next year for me I'm afraid - but looking at the photos the trip was superb.

July brought a trip to Wastwater, famed for its clear viz - great if there had been something to see other than the lunar-style muddy bottom, though we didn't venture as far as the Pinnacles which are, I understand, quite a spectacle. As it was a lovely sunny day, Jeff treated us to another barbeque whilst we watched the climbers

on the cliff face opposite wondering whether they were actually stuck, or just having a very, very long rest... Another 'qualified-only' trip to the Sound of Mull - where else can you get freshly dived scallops from the fish and chip van?!

Back to Crummock in August - and ventured around the headlands further than I had before - water a positively balmy 15 degrees - sunlight beaming through the water from the surface - rock face rising up above - and dropping off below to the lake bed below. A couple of trips this month - trying out my new (and second-hand 'new') 'toys'.

Back to Eyemouth in September - stunning once again - dived Fan Rocks in the morning and Hurkers in the afternoon. Wrasse, prawns, pipefish, sand eels, pollack, Leopard Spotted Goby, etc, etc, etc. A mind-blowing experience having a yellow pipefish swimming around my hoses and my head - dancing with it in mid water whilst Jim and Sue watched was quiet a moment to really mark my qualifying dive in my mind! We celebrated with fish and chips on the harbour-side in the early evening

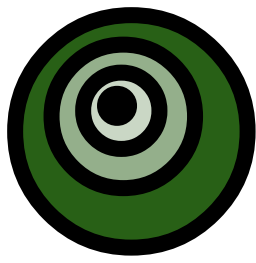
Michael Plane



CONGRATS

Cumbernauld Sub Aqua would like to congratulate our latest qualified Sport Divers, firstly our youngest member Kirsty MacDonald aged 17 gained her ticket in October last year and secondly Kenny Campbell and Stevie Quinn who qualified in August this year. Well done to them all!

Congratulations to David Gibson and Robert McCracken who recently qualified as Sport Divers. Well done to both of them on their achievement from all the instructors at Auchenharvie Branch.



BRANCHLINES

Doc Says ... Don't Drink And Dive

I THOUGHT at the start of a regular slot in **SCOTTISH DIVER** I ought to introduce myself. I started diving in 1971 and have continued on and off since then amassing some 4000 dives in all sorts of conditions and all over the world. I have been in ScotSAC for 11 years and have been your medical advisor for the past three of those years.

For this first column I thought I would tell you a couple of points raised at the recent EUBS conference in Sharm el Sheik. A lot of divers are now doing deep stops as part of routine diving practice. There was an excellent paper on this which cast doubt over the need for these. The research took the view that we all have bubbles in us at the surface, as we descend to depth these compress but then re-expand the longer we stay at a given depth back to their original size. As the diver then ascends it makes sense using this bubble theory to do deep stops to allow a slowing of bubble expansion whilst

ascending to one's normal safety stop. However if the dive is merely a bounce dive this bubble re-expansion doesn't occur so deep stops are unnecessary and unhelpful.

I am sure a few of you may have views on this, if so please let me have them.

The other interesting paper was looking at casualties using the chamber at Sharm. I am sad to say British divers make up 27% over the past 10 years. On a positive note our buoyancy skills are not a major factor to admissions unlike the Italians (next biggest group) who seem to like yo-yo profiles or the Germans who succumb to the dreaded diarrhoea effects and dehydration. Our major factor was ... too much alcoholic!

In our training ScotSAC always emphasises the dangers of drinking and diving but it seems we Scots go out on holiday and forget. In the heat of Egypt you need three litres of water at least to keep hydrated due to the heat (39° last week) so don't compound the problem by



loading up on sakara beer (nice as it is) and add to your dehydration the next day.

Sharm is a great dive destination as many will know already and Dr Abel has a great team and chamber but to keep Scottish divers out of his statistics don't drink and dive!

In view of these figures heaven help any of you with Italian/German parents diving in Britain as you would have nearly a 70% risk of ending up in the chamber!

I am happy to answer queries or to have topic ideas for the column. I am available via scotsac HQ e-mail.

Please dive safely.

Doctor Wilmot

SPECIALIST DESIGNERS & MANUFACTURERS OF HOUSING FOR UNDERWATER & SURFACE VIDEO & SCIENTIFIC EQUIPMENT

SEAPRO U.K.

SEAPRO HOUSINGS FOR PANASONIC DIGITAL VIDEO

ALL MODELS: Special price for GS27, 250, 500 Sony HC1, HC3 and all Sony Models

Housings for any Sony video, JVC, Sharp, Canon etc. Prices from £695 - 85mtr rating.

EXCLUSIVE! Only Seapro housings have the unique "Optilite Port". Gives wide angle below and above water in perfect focus. No "Hunting" of the video camera. Fully corrected underwater "optic".

Underwater lighting and the new Seapro "Great White Lite". The most powerful underwater lamp available for its size in the world. Manufactured by GREENAWAY MARINE

SONY DIGITAL MODEL HDR HC3

DEEP WATER HOUSINGS TO 250 METRES

If you want alive, living images that tell the true story of your dive, use your video camera in a SEAPRO Housing

Visit our website to see our "complete outfits"

SEAPRO can house any video camera in the world. Write, phone or fax for free catalogue: GREENAWAY MARINE, BASSET DOWN, SWINDON SN4 9QP U.K. Tel: 01793 814992 Fax: 813973 www.greenawaymarine.com www.videocamerasunderwater.com

Scubasure

Specialist Insurance Schemes for Divers

Worldwide Travel Single & Annual Multi Trip

Comprehensive All Daba Equipment Insurance

Boats and Compressors

Phone: 01905 612944 Fax: 01905 611180 Email: info@scubasure.com

Buy online at - www.scubasure.com