



Clyde Illuminated At Night

Mike Clark

A night dive on the Clyde? Not to sure if that appeals? Neither was Mike Clark and his doubts were reinforced when the dive boat skipper asked him to turn off his torch. However things soon brightened up and Mike found himself in a fascinatingly illuminated world enjoying one of his best dives in recent years ...

A NIGHT dive on a Clyde wreck, have you ever heard the like? In all my years of diving I had not. So when Elaine Watt of Clyde Diving charters, invited me over to dive the *Greenock*, I was certainly up for it. It would however, take me a full year before we could get together to make the trip.

The day we planned did come around eventually and my day at work passed quickly. I headed out along the M8 motorway hoping, I was going to miss the worst of the traffic. I pulled into Inverkip marina at 6 o'clock on the nose. Being late October the last of the day's light was almost extinguished.

For this trip the *Clutha* dive charter boat would remain at her moorings and we would dive from the Clyde Diving rib kindly skippered by Elaine's partner Drew. I had travelled on charter boats by night but never by fast rib. The electronics that led us to the site were the only source of light, otherwise it was pitch black. This felt like James Bond stuff.

Once above the site, the shot was carefully dropped and Elaine ensured it was in the wreck. The kit was on and we went over the side. After ensuring that the luminous faces of my gauges and computer were brightly charged up, the torch was turned off and we started our descent.

"In the black of night, descending into the perceived black waters of the Clyde and the torches are being turned off! I hear you cry!"

This was at Elaine's behest and it was

worth it, as the bio luminescence was fantastic. Electric green explosions of light erupted all around us whenever we moved our hands. It was a good show but I was starting to get concerned about grounding my camera gear into the deck, of the *Greenock*, so I was relieved when Elaine's torch illuminated a couple of bollards just forward of the stern of the wreck.

The *Greenock* is now quite a difficult wreck to orientate yourself around especially since the Royal Navy had to detonate the two mines that had rested against her hull since the Second World War. In the resulting explosion the mine at the stern broke the little dredgers back and destroyed a lot of the stern. Whilst that area of the wreck is a little confusing, further forward the wreck is intact and features are easily identifiable.

The first place a diver will investigate is the bucket gantry. This large structure has now collapsed over the starboard side of the wreck. You can still see rows of large dredging buckets. The supports for this system have collapsed onto the deck and here you can see the immense cogs that powered the device.

After investigating this we moved over to the starboard hull and to the broken stern. Here there is a resident Conger Eel who unfortunately, on this occasion, was not to be seen.

It was at this stage of the dive that I noted the difference diving this wreck at night. The water clarity was as good as in the day at around 4 metres. In

daytime very little ambient light penetrates to the wreck so even then a torch is necessary to dive this wreck.

What did strike me was all to do with the marine life. Wherever I shone my torch the golden reflection from the eyes of prawns came back at me. They were everywhere and these 10cm specimens in turn drew in the fish.

Large schools of pollack meandered around the wreck. Some of these fish appeared to be 'sleepswimming'. They would bump into sections of the wreck and swim into the sea floor. Whilst there were a good few examples of these sleepy fish the vast majority of the shoals were finning around, probably looking for some prawns to snap up. I had never seen so many fish on a Clyde wreck before and at one point we were engulfed by the school of pollack.

Other good finds were a nice big scorpion fish and some luminous green Devonshire Cup Corals which I was very pleased to see, as these corals are good indicators of good water quality. Feather stars and crinoids also covered every square centimetre of the wreck; these creatures are much more visible at night as their arms were raised to feed. This wreck certainly was an oasis of life in an otherwise barren sea of mud.

From the broken stern of the wreck we finned over the now caved in deck.

After the mine blast broke the *Greenock's* back, this section has been opened up a good deal. I managed to miss or failed to recognise the spare prop, engines and



Images : top - luminous green Devonshire Cup coral; and above - velvet-backed swimming crab

boilers but I can confirm from previous dives that they are all there. They are said to be easier to see with the deck having been blasted away.

From here we finned forward along the port hull and the intact wall of steel soon resumes to an impressive 5 metres off the sea floor. Crinnoids, starfish, soft corals and sea Squirts adorn this part of the wreck using it as a surrogate cliff face. It really is a scenic part of the wreck. On closer inspection you will find more prawns nestling in the cover along with marauding Velvet Backed Swimming Crabs.

Just prior to the bow we rose back up to deck level just in time to take in the huge deck winch, which dominates the bow area of the wreck. This area was also a little more exposed to the tide and I was blasted around the bow before getting back into the shelter of the wreck, at the forward end of the bucket gantry.

From here it was an easy fin back along the line of buckets, noting a big old Edible crab in residence in one of them. I then finned back to all the cogs and drive machinery at the top of the wreck. From here just over on the port side the two bollards came into view and the shot line beckoned.

My night of exploration of the wreck was over and the engines and boilers along with the prop would just have to be explored another day or even better night. The dive was not over though as the bio luminescent fire work display helped to while away our deco stops.

HISTORY OF THE GREENOCK

THERE IS nothing better than re-searching the history of a wreck to make that diving experience all the more enjoyable. I was quite surprised to find out about the *Greenock* as there is a lot to read. She was even making the headlines after she hit the bottom.

Late on in the day of Tuesday November 18, 1902. The *Greenock* was heading down the Clyde to dump her day's dredgings. This was no different from any other day, as the *Greenock* and her sister ship *Gourock* operated in the area, ensuring harbours and channels were deep enough for the big boats to come up the Clyde.

On the return trip when she was nearing the prominent land mark of the Cloch lighthouse, the steamer *Ape* was noted, on an inshore course from the dredger. Nothing looked untoward until the vessels were abreast and the *Ape* veered towards the *Greenock* slicing through the hull right up to the bucket gantry. The collision damage can still be seen to this day. It was a tragic accident and the chief engineer lost his 16 year old son in the collision.

The wreck was located and thereafter forgotten about until the war years arrived. The Clyde with its important ship building yards must have been a tempting target for German raiders. Where a surface vessel would find it difficult to gain entry to the estuary there was a very real threat from the U boat.

It was prudent then that anti submarine nets and a defensive boom stretched right across the Clyde from the Cloch Lighthouse to the small town of Dunoon. With this threat in mind the wreck of the *Greenock* was treated to some special attention. It was after all a perfect place for a brave U boat captain to hide his boat awaiting his time to get through the defences.

The Royal Navy therefore placed a mine at the stern of the wreck and another off the port

side of the bow. Any U boat arriving at the scene would now get a nasty surprise.

The war years thereafter passed uneventfully for the *Greenock* and she wasn't really of interest to anybody until sport diving took a hold. Soon lots of divers were visiting the site and viewing the mines that still lie on the seabed beside the wreck.

It was in the mid 1990's when an intrepid wreck diver is said to have revealed his prize in a local pub. A long brass bar which turned out to be one of the mine's mercury contact switches had been gently removed from the mine with the aid of a mash hammer. I bet a chill still runs up the spine of the culprit every time he thinks back on the event.

Eventually the news got back to the Navy and the mines were deemed to pose a threat to the public. In 1996 a demolition team destroyed the mines making them safe. The bow mine did little damage but the one at the stern severely damaged the *Greenock's* stern and broke the ship's back. Now the wreck is still enjoyed by divers without the threat of unexploded mines.



CHARTER BOAT: Clyde Diving Services
Drew and Elaine
01475 522 930 / www.clyde-diving.co.uk

The boat launches from Inverkip marina which is a 30 minute drive from Glasgow. Diving is all year round as the area is protected from the wind and there is usually always a wreck to dive in water protected by a lee shore.