



A nicely captured shot of Loch Fyne life - marine and human The marina is located in a scenic spot (image courtesy pixsub.com)



The colonised torpedo (JM)



Conger eel (JM)

The new marina at Portavadie on Loch Fyne will give divers the opportunity to explore the relatively uncharted bottom half of the loch while enjoying the benefits of the new facilities. Jack Morrison and Gordon MacSkimming went along to find out more and were impressed by the diving and the facilities at the new marina ...

MOST OF us have at some time dived in Loch Fyne, at the well known sites of the Tearooms, Furnace Quarry, Kenmore Point, Stallion Rock and all the areas down the east side which are known to different clubs by different names. Gortien Point for instance used to be called the 'Lobster Spot' by my club because every time we dived there somebody came out with a lobster. That was back in the sixties when the water was clear, there were fish to be seen and you could pick up a dozen scallops at the end of your dive.

However then, as now, the bottom half of the loch was largely undived. Look at a map or a chart and it's easy to see why, there is very little access from the road and where there is access the water is shallow and uninteresting. What you need is a boat and until recently that meant bringing your own.

Now there is one charter boat *Little Blue* based in Tarbert and skipper Malcolm Goodchild has introduced us to the delights of diving in this area. Although Malcolm is based in Tarbert he is willing to come over and pick up groups from Portavadie. This can be problematic as the ferry slip is far from ideal for loading and unloading. However I'm pleased to say that is about to change with the building of a new marina in Portavadie.

This new development will offer yachtsmen and divers the opportunity to explore this part of the loch and, with a good boat, right down to the top of Aran.

The chum Gordon and I spent a very cold but pleasant winter afternoon being shown round by

manager Robert Kitchen. The marina has 230 berths on floating pontoons with power, water and lighting. It is based in a man-made lagoon, a large deep hole in the ground dug in the early seventies for the construction of oil rigs but never used. This as you would imagine gives a very calm shelter.

Much of the development is still under construction, the restaurant; bar etc will all be in one large modern building which should be complete later this year.

There is an office with adjacent toilet, showers and laundry all immaculately kept. At the end of the marina looking out over the loch toward Tarbert and with fabulous views of Aran are five cottages. These belong to the marina and are for rent either for the week or the weekend, ideal for a club expedition.

The cottages have two bedrooms - one a double, the other a twin but they plan to change the double rooms so the bed can be split into another twin. Although there are only two bedrooms it is possible to sleep in the lounge so each could accommodate six divers. The cottages are brand new with fully fitted kitchens and have stunning views across to the hills above Tarbert and looking left over to Aran.

The marina has a slip for launching RIBs and if you are staying in one of the cottages you get a free berth in the marina. Fuel is available, both diesel and petrol, which is unusual as most marinas only have diesel however they don't have a compressor so the nearest air is Malcolm in Tarbert. If you don't have your own boat another option would be to charter

Portavadie

Little Blue and Malcolm will be able to come and pick you up from the marina. It will also be possible to come for the day and for a small fee you can use the slip to launch.

This new development opens up a whole new area which was until now quite difficult to access. Don't get me wrong this is not completely undived, people have been diving here, mostly scallop divers, but for most of us it is a largely unknown area. If your club is looking for somewhere different and not too far away, Portavadie Marina is well worth considering for a weekend.

So what's the diving like around here? Well I've written about it before but every trip I do here Malcolm takes me to a site I've never dived before. There are wrecks in this area but I usually go out with a group of photographers - a nightmare for the ordinary diver - so we tend to want to dive reefs where there is more marine life.

There are lots of offshore reefs around here so let me describe two of the most recent ones I've dived. The first is not far from Portavadie and is called Torpedo Reef, guess why? That's right there is a torpedo lying on top of it. It's an old torpedo and it has a resident family of goldsinny's swimming around the open end looking curiously at the divers. They're waiting for us to disturb the bottom and expose small crustaceans for them to eat.

From the torpedo we headed east and down over a few rock shelves to a sandy bottom with the usual queenies flying off in a panic. Heading south along the base of the reef there was a bit of loose kelp and hiding beneath was a red gurnard. This quite large fish walks along the bottom on what look like legs. I'm not sure what they're called but the fish uses them to move and to dig for food.

This gurnard was a bit shy and refused to turn round to have his picture taken so all I ended up with was another fish tail picture to add to my growing collection. We started to make our way back up over the shelves which were crawling with life. Edible crabs, velvet swimming crabs with their distinctive red eyes, squat lobsters and hiding under a large rock a good sized lobster.

Big expanses of flat rocks are

good places to see Norwegian topknots, small flatfish with reddish pink patches on their backs. Lots of plumose, belocera and colourful dahlia anemones and on the branches of hydroids tiny colourful nudibranchs.

Amazingly, and I have to admit unplanned, we find ourselves back at the torpedo and the shotline where we spend our safety stop frustratingly trying to photograph sea gooseberries, you know those amorphous jellyfish with the iridescent lines pulsing through them.

The second reef is one of my favourites around here; Malcolm calls it Duncan's Garden. Lying just north-west of Portavadie it is probably the closest reef to the marina and arguably the best. At low tide the top of the reef is only about 10m but the visibility for some reason is usually good and standing at the back of the boat waiting to jump you can see the light patches which are plumose anemones. In fact these are probably the biggest metridium I have seen.

The reef sprawls over quite an area with patches of sand among the rocky outcrops. The east side drops sharply in places to about 20m, the west has more rolling rock faces but goes down to about 27m. The rocks have everything you would expect, from delicate hydroids to large dahlia anemones. There are also some deep gullies especially on the west side where you can find edible crab and congers.

I've never had bad viz on this reef and I think that's part of its appeal; there aren't many dives with undulating scenery and viz good enough to see it. This is a great area for a club expedition with a wide range of dives to suit everyone and now with excellent accommodation and a brand new marina. Oh and did I mention between Otter Ferry and Portavadie we saw four buzzards, a sea eagle and a golden eagle. No, must have slipped my mind!

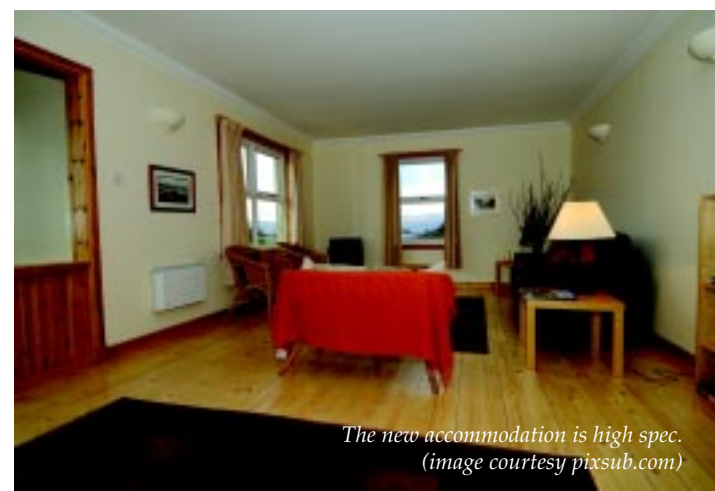
Portavadie Marina
Portavadie, Loch Fyne,
Argyll, PA21 2DA
T: 01700 811075 (marina office)
E: info@portavadiemarina.com
W: www.portavadiemarina.com



The marina is located in a scenic spot (image courtesy pixsub.com)



The new properties (image courtesy pixsub.com)



The new accommodation is high spec. (image courtesy pixsub.com)



Good views too (image courtesy pixsub.com)

Made Easy