

Owen Paisley's recent dive at Furnace was spoiled by the amount of rubbish lying on the sea floor. Now he asks is it time to make a fight back ...



Rubbish Diving

Many moons ago, I wrote the following for **SCOTTISH DIVER**: "Scotland is home to some of the most beautiful coastline in the world, yet much of it attracts a motley collection of marine litter, spoiling beaches for visitors and threatening wildlife and human health. Of course the problem does not stop at the strandline, as any diver who has dived in the vicinity of busy beaches, harbours, piers or slipways will testify."

Although I didn't list quarries, I was reminded of the above when Owen Paisley sent me the following brilliant exposition of the ugly legacy we risk leaving in our seas. Have a read and then look at Page 33 to find some suggestions from MCS about what you can do to help.

Calum Duncan



Discarded rubbish bag in Furnace Quarry (Owen Paisley)

WHAT DO Seasearch coordinators do when they are not running courses? Well strangely enough they sometimes go diving and even more strangely they sometimes go diving and don't fill in a Seasearch form!

One Sunday in March, just for a change I went diving at a place known to many Glasgow divers, Furnace Quarry. It was a bitterly cold day and the quarry was looking particularly industrial. Undaunted we jumped into the water and were rewarded with excellent visibility.

Initially our attention was caught by some shimmering comb jellies hovering in the water. One of my favourite marine animals they look like mini-starships hovering in the void.

Further down we came across a winter garden of pale sea loch anemones carpeting the rocks and later on some enormous deeplet sea anemones. These were the reason for us diving on such a bitterly cold day.

A computer glitch had led to the loss of many of my photographs of Loch Fyne marine life so I had started the long process of rebuilding the collection and the deeplet anemone being one of the Loch Fyne specialities was first on the list. I knew they could be found in Furnace quarry and wasn't disappointed having obtained several good photographs by the end of the dive.

As the dive progressed though the amount of rubbish and debris on the seabed became harder to ignore. I've always been a bit ambivalent about rubbish on the seabed. Sometimes our discarded waste provides valuable shelter for marine life and a juvenile lobster

doesn't care if it is hiding beneath a rock or a discarded tin.

Yet as we continued I became more depressed by the sheer amount of rubbish lying amongst the boulders. Tins, bottles, a plate, a bag of rubbish carefully tied at the top, old metal sheeting, wire cable, some old chain and metres of discarded fishing line.

Of course it is true that the entire boulder slope at Furnace is man made, a result of many years of quarrying operations, so why worry about a few discarded bottles? After all, it is a working quarry and no sensible person would expect a manicured landscape, yet just a few metres below the surface lie these wonderful and delicate animals.

I think the rubbish disturbed me because of the stark contrast with the beauty of the marine life. It was as if the ugliness of the surface was seeping through the water into the winter garden below. So what did I do? Well I took several photographs and then my dive computer decided to die, the low temperature being too much for the failing battery.

On surfacing though I wondered if it was time for a change. After all, if the boulders of Furnace quarry were on land and visited by hundreds of outdoor enthusiasts each year would we put up with discarded cans, bags of rubbish and fishing line? Should ScotSAC take a lead and encourage clubs to clean up their favourite dive sites or should we just accept rubbish as part of 21st century life?

Owen Paisley
Seasearch West Coast co-ordinator

Turning The Tide On Trash

CALUM DUNCAN



Volunteers enjoying an MCS Adopt-a-Beach event at Cramond in January 2008 (Calum Duncan/MCS)



Litter removed from the stomach contents of a leatherback turtle washed up in Wigtown Bay, Solway Firth in 1998 (Peter Richardson/MCS)



Tangled gannet (Steve Trehwella)

RUBBISH SPOILS dives, is a hazard to boat-users, divers and anglers and kills sea life. Globally, over 100,000 marine mammals and one million seabirds are estimated to die every year from eating or becoming tangled in rubbish.

During MCS Beachwatch last year, 2,054 pieces of rubbish were recorded for every kilometre of the 354 UK beaches surveyed and 58% of all litter items were made of plastic. In fact the 1198 plastic items recorded per kilometre is the highest ever recorded in MCS Beachwatch surveys!

Another report by the United Nations estimates that there are 46,000 pieces of rubbish for every square mile of the world's oceans. The full Beachwatch 2007 report now available online at www.mcsuk.org catalogues many other shocking figures.

Be part of the solution

However, there is a growing awareness of the problem and a determination to turn the tide on all this trash. MCS has been at the forefront of this issue for years, through our Beachwatch and Adopt-a-Beach projects. There are many ways you can be part of the solution rather than part of the problem.

Organise an Underwater Clean-up

As Owen suggests, dive clubs can get pro-active and organise an MCS Underwater Clean-up. Why not target a favourite dive site, collect and record the rubbish there to do your bit and set an example to other clubs? Every year, a few Underwater Clean-ups contribute towards our annual Beachwatch event.

Get involved with Beachwatch or Adopt-a-Beach

MCS Beachwatch takes place every

September as part of the International Coastal Cleanup taking place in over 80 countries worldwide. The survey provides a 'snapshot' of the amount, type and sources of litter washed up around the UK. Groups really keen to turn the tide can Adopt-a-Beach and carry out additional surveys in winter, spring and summer. MCS uses all the information to support our call for tougher laws and measures to tackle rubbish

Leave only footprints

'Recreational' rubbish like crisp packets, drinks cans, bottles, caps, lids, fag ends and sweetie wrappers amounts to a significant percentage of all rubbish on our beaches. If we all took it home from beaches and boat-trips and disposed of it properly, a third of the problem would disappear.

Bag it and bin it

At home, we can help marine wildlife by bagging and binning cotton bud sticks and other sanitary products instead of treating the toilet like a wet dustbin

Record threatened sea life

Help MCS protect basking sharks and turtles by sending in records of these gentle giants and their jellyfish prey or of course help map threatened seabed habitats with Seasearch.

Ask your local MSP to do more

Support the joint campaign for a Scottish Marine Bill with the environment at its heart by visiting www.savescottishseas.org and writing to your local Member of the Scottish Parliament (MSP). They DO listen and you CAN make a difference!

Recently, MCS has also been working closely with Rebecca Hosking, who made a harrowing film about the impact of

plastic rubbish on albatrosses in Hawaii and then inspired her local town of Modbury in South Devon to go plastic bag free. Many other towns across the UK are hoping to follow suit, including North Berwick where MCS contributed to an evening of talks in support of the East Lothian town going plastic bag free.

To find out more about any of these projects and what you can do to help our seas, log on to www.mcsuk.org and www.adoptabeach.org.uk, call (0131) 226 6360 or email scotland@mcsuk.org. Read about Modbury at www.plasticbagfree.com.

To view the programme of Seasearch activity in Scotland in 2008, please visit www.seasearch.org.uk.



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