



# Mike Has The Last Laugh

**SCOTTISH DIVER's Mike Clark is**

**a regular at the St Abbs Splash-In,**

**and he's enjoyed success at the event**

**in previous years. But how would**

**he fare under new rules in 2008 ...**

THE ST. ABBS and Eyemouth voluntary marine reserve 'Splash-In' event is a highlight of my diving year. It's a time to meet like-minded individuals with a great interest in underwater photography; and it doesn't matter if you are a serious professional or a beginner as photographers of all levels of experience are encouraged to enter the competition.

The 'Splash-In' takes place within the reserve over the August bank holiday weekend; and the first challenge is to register an entry to the competition. This takes place at 8am on the Saturday morning.

A couple of years ago I drove past at 8am on the dot and was amazed at the length of the queue. At that stage there were limits of 20 entrants for both film and digital categories and I had a bit of a sweat going as I just managed to scrape in on one of the last available places. This year though it was all digital and there were 40 available places. In the end 35 photographers entered the competition.

The next challenge of the day is always the weather. August had been \*\*\*\* (Editor - extremely poor) but the fickle weather turned good this year for the Saturday and Sunday of the competition, before reverting back to standard dismal. My buddy Gordon Mackie of Tuscan Divers was once again doing a fine job of

the posing for me this year.

The sun may have been out but the vis hadn't had time to improve so it was a gloomy 5m peer that greeted us once we were in the water. There was a fairly large swell running as well, shore diving certainly would have been challenging in the early part of the day.

Thankfully though Gordon and myself were on the boat *Wavedancer*. There were 12 divers on board, 6 photographers and 6 posers. Then just as the boat was departing the harbour drama happened as Jean's neck seal went pop. This cancelled the dive for Jean and off she went to see Amanda from Scoutscroft Dive Centre who was doing a roaring trade in drysuit repairs over the weekend. Jean would be back in the water for the second dive of the day with a shiny new neck seal fitted.

Then there was more drama as Gordon tried to connect his suit inflation hose to the new valve on his suit, it didn't fit even though it was the same make. Help was offered from the other divers but no hoses were available apart from Jean's regulator, which low and behold had the right hose on it. Quick bit of regulator open surgery and we were back in business.

Into the water and as said the vis was poor and there was a big surge. We decided to head for deeper water. Once

we got to a reasonably sheltered spot we deployed fake tulips and watering can. This was in a bid to win the John Goldie memorial trophy for the most humorous shot of the day. I had met John who was an active diver and I really wanted to put in a good show for that section of the competition.

Gordon and I had had the idea of the flowers and watering can for three years but never had the chance to enter it in the competition, due to the previous timetable that required all entries be handed in by 2pm on the Saturday. This was because of the need to have film processed. Thankfully now it's all digital and there is less need to rush as 6pm is the new deadline.

So flower shot completed we finned along the reef hoping for something dramatic to turn up. It certainly did as we found a nice wolf fish, but I just couldn't manage to get a good shot of him. Then we came across a monster lobster walking about in the open and I managed to get some really nice shots of it with Gordon in the background.

I started to feel a bit more confident as I had an inkling that I had a nice shot. All too soon it was time to ascend. Back on the *Wavedancer* thanks to its lift, I had a coffee in hand and joined in the excited chatter that was going on onboard. Everybody had had a good dive but all

were keeping tight-lipped about the images they had captured ...

More drama as Gordon's zip had parted from his drysuit and half the North Sea emptied out of his drysuit when we were back on board. I had to take my hat off to him for being able to pose with all that cold water in his suit. Back on dry land Gordon was another customer for Amanda's drysuit repair service and I had lost my poser for the day.

New tactics were required and I decided to change to a macro (close up) set up to capture some images of marine life in the reserve. From what I saw on my first dive of the day macro was the way to go with the vis being so bad. Needless to say conditions turned out to be better for wide angle on the second dive but that's the breaks.

Suitably rested I dropped in for dive number two and followed the reef around where it joined the sandy seabed around 18 metres. I was hoping to find a wolf fish on this dive but none were about.

I did notice movement on the far reaches of my vision and I noted it was a plaice. It let me get fairly close and I managed a couple of shots before it darted off into the sand. Being at 18 metres it didn't take too long before I was aware of deco and air requirements so I moved into the shallows.

Unfortunately here there was still a fair surge in the water but even so I managed to get a few really nice nudibranch images. Once again after an hour in the water it was time to surface. I felt good though, I had done the best that I could in the conditions and I was reasonably pleased with the images I had captured.

Back on board *Wavedancer* I once again join some animated chat; it sounded as though everybody had had another nice dive. For me a highlight of the event was the camaraderie and banter on board so thanks to everybody on *Wavedancer* that day.

Back at the car and de-suited it was time for me to report in before the deadline. Taking a picture once again of my designated number that I had photographed in the morning. This establishes that all the images in-between the images of the designated numbers were taken at the time of the competition.

I now had until high noon on Sunday to submit my two chosen images for the competition. This is hard work as there are three categories. On this occasion I

had reasonable images for each category - marine life portrait, reserve atmospheric and John Goldie most humorous shot.

I decided to go with my underwater gardener shot for the most humorous category and my close up shot of the plaice for the marine life portrait category. It was a tough call as I really liked my diver/lobster shot but the rules only let you enter two images and I had to drop one.

I submitted my selected images and then went on to have two lovely shore dives, getting out and packing my gear away just in time for the image display and judging.

If you are a budding underwater photographer don't miss this show if you get a chance to attend. You will learn a lot by viewing all the different images captured the day before. I certainly enjoy the spectacle seeing what other divers have found and photographed in the reserve.

Now a brilliant addition to the competition is the half time break where all the audience is invited to go across to the hall next door for drinks and snacks whilst the judging takes place. This is a great time to have a chinwag with regulars who attend the event every year and for meeting new friends too. Wine and soft drinks are supplied and lively debate about which images impressed



Above: Diver and lobster; below: Mike's marine life portrait of plaice; and overpage: entry in the Humorous Category



soon follows.

Judging complete it was back over to the show and Lawson Wood was giving a presentation, which nicely filled the time before the results were announced, in reverse order, and the prizes were given out.

As I said I always enjoy the show and my thanks go to the people who organise it and work hard behind the scenes to make the St. Abbs and Eyemouth Splash in such a great event. I would also like to thank my poser for the last few years Gordon Mackie of Tuscan Divers who once again posed brilliantly and started off the technical underwater gardening craze that has swept a rain soaked Scotland this year.

For full results of the 2008 Splash-In competition see feature on Page 23.



*Back on board Wavedancer I once again join some animated chat; it sounded as though everybody had had another nice dive. For me a highlight of the event was the camaraderie and banter on board so thanks to everybody on Wavedancer that day.*