



Conference Comment

Jack Morrison reports from this
year's Dive Conference where
superstars Farr and Bantin shone ...

FOR THE second year organisers chose Oban High School as the venue for the Dive Conference. Last year it proved to be an almost perfect venue with classrooms used for workshops, a large dining hall for lunch, free parking, an easy to find location and it was comfortable.

Over a hundred delegates sat enthralled by the three main speakers and the workshops were very well attended. Our thanks to Historic Scotland for their kind sponsorship and to Philip Robertson for running one of the most popular workshops explaining the role of Historic Scotland and how divers can help identify and protect Scotland's maritime heritage.

An innovation this year was a photographic competition, delegates were invited to bring along one mounted print and as a result 21 prints went on display in the hall leading to the dining room. The winner this year was Tim Chamberlain from Napier University Branch with a very engaging picture of a diver trying to teach a seal to ballroom dance.

The breakout rooms were very popular this year with most of the workshops repeated so delegates could attend at least two of them. Dr Wilmot attracted good numbers, as did the Marine Conservation Society, Photoshop and all the others. There was a lot to learn about funding your club from **sportscotland** and Divemaster had a representative on hand to answer any insurance questions.

Back in the main hall, our MC for the day (chairman Andrew Murray) quickly ran through the programme and introduced the first speaker - Martyn Farr. Martyn is the author of several books, the best known being *The Darkness Beckons*. The book and Martyn's talk centres around his experiences of cave diving. Before I heard Martyn (and I think I speak for 90% of the audience) I would have said that there was not enough money in the world to persuade me to go cave diving. By the end I wasn't so sure as the water always seems to be crystal clear and the scenery spectacular.

However if I could be persuaded to try cave diving it would have to be in the good old US of A, where entry to the springs in Florida are via carpeted steps and the caves themselves have signposts with the grim reaper telling you not to go any further or you could lose your life, you're underwater, in a

cave, of course you could lose your life!

Martyn delivered his talk with typical Welsh wit and understated expertise. When you realise just how many of the divers who influenced him are no longer with us it is testament to just how good he is at what he does, and did I mention he manages to take brilliant photographs as well? Have a look at his galleries on: www.farworld.co.uk to see what I mean.

After lunch Andy Jackson took to the stage and gave us a history lesson. This was like watching a live documentary on the history channel. His subject was an incident from the First World War that took place off the Isle of May involving K-class submarines.

Andy started by telling us how and why they were developed and some of the mishaps that occurred during that process. Eventually they were put into commission and on the fateful night in January 1918 a squadron of them formed part of a large battle group which sailed from Rosyth bound for Scapa Flow. Andy led us through the events which led to the disaster when there were four collisions and two submarines were sunk with a loss of over a hundred sailors.

Andy showed us video from the dives he has made on one of the wrecks lying in 58m. By matching his footage to the original plans he has worked out how he thinks it sank and which submarine it is. He feels very strongly that this was an accident and that no-one was to blame and would like to see a TV company do a proper documentary. Of course the whole thing was kept secret during the war and a memorial cairn was only built in 2003. I hope he is successful as I thoroughly enjoyed the story which was well told by Andy.

Last of the main speakers was *Diver* magazine's chief correspondent, John

Bantin. Given the worldwide circulation of *Diver* he is arguably one of the best known divers in the world. He has perhaps the most enviable job in diving spending his time testing new equipment or travelling around the world reporting on exotic dive destinations - and he gets paid for it!

The title of John's talk was 'A Job To Do' and it quickly became clear that is exactly what it is - a job, work, toil, not just a free holiday or a never ending supply of free diving gear (it all gets returned). Yes it is enjoyable, and yes he does enjoy it but as he repeatedly said you have to come back with the goods or you could be looking for the second best job in diving. His background as a professional photographer working in advertising has instilled in him the knowledge and the discipline needed to do just that.

His anecdotes and stories of when things have gone wrong were hilarious but no matter what he always came back with the goods. John's photographs were excellent as you would expect from a professional and I for one learned a lot about how to take pictures that tell the story and get the message across. I think his self-effacing wit and charm must help open doors and perhaps persuade people to do things they may not normally do. Certainly by the end of his talk he left his audience charmed and smiling and completely envious of what he does for a living.

Finally, the raffle was a huge success thanks to the companies who generously donated such fabulous prizes. Scubapro gave us a Galileo Sol won by Sue MacDougal, a Nexus computer from A P Valves (Buddy) and a trip for two on the *Northern Belle* with a five course meal won by Jimmy Gilmour - the longest serving member of ScotSAC still diving. Can't wait for next year.

Jack Morrison



Top prize winner Sue MacDougal



An enthralled audience