



**CUUEG and CUUEX
Cape Wrath
29th August - 1st September 1998**

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Divers:

- Andy James
- Sam Cockerill
- Nick Harrison
- Rob Critchley
- Guy Hewitt

Cape Wrath is on the furthest top left hand corner of the Scottish mainland, and despite its rather ominous name offers some of the most scenic and varied dive sites in the UK. Andy James has a house in the area which he offered as a base for a four day outing to explore some of the sites he dives regularly, as well as a few new ones.

Diving off the CUUEX RIB, our first dip was in a sheltered gulley just North of Droman. We had been forewarned that the visibility was unsettled, but given that 30m is par for the course here, we were still hopeful - and not disappointed. Gliding down, the gulley widens and dips down through a coarse boulderfield, which is brightly illuminated through the flat calm surface still visible 25m above us. As this opens out into a smooth plateau we find the whole bed strewn with tiny black starfish.

Through the weekend, each dive seemed to offer another surprise - The eerily dark space-scape dive under the peaty top layers in Loch Inchar; Andy's record braking scallop haul; The seals in Loch Eriboll and Loch Inchar. The close encounter in Loch Eriboll was probably the highlight of my weekend;

Our first clue comes as we stumble upon a collection of dogfish corpses, each precisely nipped behind the head and neatly piled at the mouth of a shallow cave where scavenging starfish are making the most of this unprotected larder. As we continue, silhouetted movement in the distance flicks in and out the limit of our visibility. Is this just a trick of the light?

Then, hovering 10m in front of us, our first glimpse. The seal has clearly seen us, and pauses for a moment to take in this bizarre view before curving effortlessly into the fading blue. Both cautious yet curious, it is not long before he reappears behind us, this time closer. We slow our breathing to avoid startling him with our bubbles, and sink into the kelp. As we continue the appearances grow more frequent. It soon becomes clear there are two - possibly a mother and calf, judging by their sizes - and by the end of our dive we are face to face, separated by no more than a few metres. Suddenly, both shoot downwards and seem to disappear. Following them, we find ourselves in a shallow gulley that is almost perfectly hidden under a veil of kelp where both seals lie, face up, calmly watching us from the safety of their retreat. As we ascend, they come with us and we are greeted at the surface by their Labrador whiskered grins. It is entirely possible that we are the first divers these seals have seen.