



Anglesey June-July 1999

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Divers:

- Tom "Pain in the Butt" Riley
- Clare "Vampire" Hayward
- Daryl "Visa" Spelman
- Richard "Jellyfish" Riley
- Nicola "Bouyant" Armitage

Diving...

Sometime towards the end of the Easter holiday I realised that I'd have a whole week free in the space between the Farnes trip and Scapa, so given the choice between sorting my life out in Cambridge or going diving I went for the diving.

Anglesey seemed a good choice as apart from bags of marine life, the local weather has ensured there's a nearly limitless number of wrecks. In fact it was the sinking with all hands of the Royal Charter near Moelfre in 1859 during a 145mph Hurricane that led to the introduction of the shipping forecast!

I decided to go for a camping trip as that removed the problem of having to chase up people for money for accommodation etc.

With two weeks to go it was looking good, with six people and three or four cars, I was feeling confident, with my exams over I decided to see how much it would cost to get some more substantial accommodation. Ringing around I eventually discovered somewhere with a mobile home for slightly less than it would have been to camp, things were looking good!

Two things then began to shake my confidence, Jamie's supervisor started looking murderous at the mention of taking any more time of to go diving. Daryl discovered that his visa to darkest Indonesia hadn't turned up. Ed had to graduate and so couldn't go on Saturday, and neither could Clare. I also discovered that Clare was the longest crossover in CUUEG history, having learnt to dive two years ago in some enviably warm part of the world.

Saturday 26th June

Waiting at the kitstore on Saturday morning it was still looking reasonable, then Ed arrived... with a cold.

That left Clare and me, one car, and Nicola somewhere on the Wirral (Merseyside? J) expecting to meet us for a dive on Monday night. But for the rest of the week we'd have no surface cover. Briefly pausing for thought we finished getting the gear together to leave on Sunday.

Back at college I picked up the phone and phoned my brother....

"Errr.... Richard how do you feel about a week in Anglesey?... Bring your windsurfer"

A few brief mutterings about not giving me more warning to Ed and Daryl, left Daryl planning to join us when he'd got his visa and Ed hoping to get better in time to get in a few days diving.

Sunday 27th June

On Sunday morning Clare and I vastly overloaded her car with diving gear and drove off in the direction of North Wales. The journey was notable for struggling up hills, struggling to overtake lorries, and a brief stop to collect some of my dad's Marine Biology books, and various other pieces of diving and camping paraphernalia.

We dumped some of the weight in Richard's car and drove in convoy to the campsite, with an impromptu scenic tour of the area around the campsite added for free.

Monday 28th June

Out of bed bright and early looking forward to a full days diving we jumped out of bed bright and early and drove down to Anglesey diver training college, which I had been assured did air fills and Nitrox on request, only apparently not today as they'd gone to Birmingham... A short drive into Treaddur Bay discovered that neither does Anglesey Diving Services. Oh well....

One of the Advantages of Anglesey is that even when it's blowing far too strongly to dive in the open sea you can nearly always find somewhere to dive.

Given that we had no air Richard broke out his windsurfer and was soon blasting across Treaddur Bay, dodging the rock in the middle, and discovering that Moon jellyfish don't sting!

Clare and I decided to scout for dive sites and found several promising looking bays. Before the road climbed up away from the road. A bit further on we found a path leading down the cliff at the end of it we found South Stack lighthouse and RSPB reserve. Stars of the show were the five Chuffs which the reserve staff were proudly shown to us by the reserve staff, and after looking over the wall at the Herring gull chicks and a tour of the light house we drove into Holyhead. A route down to the front of the Harbour wall (recommended as a dive site) was discovered and we drove back to collect Richard.

Nicola arrived during the afternoon and Daryl later that evening by train. During the evening we revised resuscitation techniques and went to bed looking forward to a good days diving.

Tuesday 29th of June

Thinking that nothing could stop us getting into the water nice and early to make the most of the tide, we drove off towards ADTC, and ran into a herd of cows on their way to milking! Half an hour later we arrived to find that they weren't open yet and drove back round to get our fills at Anglesey Diving Services and at last Clare and I walked down the beach to the water!

We'd obviously picked the same day as the annual Jellyfish suicide convention as Hundreds of them had piled themselves up on the beach and once in the water we were surrounded by Moon Jellies and a couple of Lion's Mane whose tentacles we kept well clear of!

After a quick fin pivot we swam towards the entrance to the bay and found a couple of Ballan Wrasse doing what ever it is they do.

A few Dragonettes decided that discretion was the better part of valour and skipped off along the bottom perused for a short distance by us!

Unfortunately my torch was showing signs of dying so the number of holes I could look into was limited, a small crack revealed a very well concealed lobster that definitely wasn't coming out.

Following this we did a few drills, which earned me a reputation for sadism and taught Clare how to recover her reg.

Having discovered that you can get chilly in a drysuit if you don't do much for a while, we remedied this with a quick fin around outside the bay looking for life and found lots of kelp!

Returning to the bay we surfaced to make sure that the Surface cover knew we were okay and then had a go at mask clearing, despite the cold salty water Clare managed a complete mask clear before the end of the dive. (time 53min, depth 4.2m!!)

After lunch an interesting dive involving more than its fair share of surface swimming, eventually Nicola and I submerged and we swam along the outside of the island.

The Bottom was covered in a thick layer of kelp, which meant that although there probably was a lot of life there you couldn't see it. A couple of Ballan Wrasse and a Gold Sinney came to have a look at us, shortly followed by a Pollack which came to have a look at what we were doing. We discovered a rusty chain which (I found out later) had come from a boat which had dropped it's anchor as a last ditch attempt to stop itself going aground- it didn't work!

Eventually the chain petered out and we found a gully, which we decided to investigate. We found a small ledge on which was a Prawn a couple of velvet crabs, an elephants ear sponge all neatly lined up next to each other, various other sponges and anemones provided a backdrop. We swam on for a bit during which I tangled (and untangled) the SMB in a pot line and we saw starfish and a few more Wrasse.

We then surfaced and swam back to the beach.

Another group of divers had been diving on the far side of the island during the day Clare and I decided to investigate this. However due to a rather precarious route to the entry in and large boulder just of the entry point, it proved to be a little too adventurous so we aborted and opted for the quiet life.

By this stage Daryl was literally hopping from one foot to another, dying to get into the water, however he was persuaded to wait for a while longer with the prospect of a night dive at the end of it.

Having a slap up meal in a warm cosy restaurant in Treaddur bay made the prospect of pulling my drysuit on for the third time that day begin to lose it's appeal.

However night dives usually are rather special, so long after sunset we arrived back at the dive site and pulled on our diving gear.

We did this dive in the gully between the mainland and the island, and it turned out to be rather spectacular. By this time the tide had come in which made the entry considerably easier as we could now use the steps cut into the rock!

It's hard to describe a night dive to someone who hasn't done one, the closest I can do is to say that it feels a bit like being an astronaut exploring a dark alien world in a science fiction film. Also many creatures which are normally skulking in holes during the day come out at night to feed which usually leads to an interesting dive.

We floated down into the black with only our torchlight piercing the darkness, with only the sound of our exhaust bubbles breaking the

silence.

The tide had begun to ebb so there was about a knot of current running through the gully we turned and made our way upstream against it.

A few small fish hovered at the edge of our torchlight and we came across a couple of baby Ballan wrasse obviously curious about these strange invaders to their world.

We turned our torches off for a while and blackness closed in around us the only light coming from the two (surprisingly bright) chemical light-sticks that we'd attached to our pillar valves.

As we worked our way along the bottom we saw a few beedlet and dahlia anemones here and there. Before long we spotted a shore crab and a velvet crab.

This was followed by a velvet crab, which was busy eating one of the many dead moon jellies, which had been floating around earlier. By now we'd reached the end of the gully so we turned and with careful buoyancy control drifted back along the gully, flying along about a foot from the bottom before stopping at the far end.

Noticing a small ledge on the side of the gully we worked our way up to it and found that it contained a sleeping Gold Sinney Wrasse and a lobster which ran around a couple of feet from us, obviously not happy about being so close to two divers.

We dropped back to the floor of the gully, and then surfaced carefully at the nearby exit point. The wind had increased whilst we were diving and whipped up a bit of chop so we carefully exited through the froth and climbed up the steps.

Wednesday 30th June

Last night's exertions led to a late start with the result that we didn't reach the dive site until about midday, as we were feeling the need to add a bit of variety to our short list of dive sites we decided to make use of Monday's scouting trip and made our way down to the bay just outside the breakwater at Holyhead harbour. This had been recommended to me as a dive site...

Clare and I entered the water very carefully as it involved climbing over very slippery weed covered boulders. The idea was that we would complete her crossover and discovered that the viz was very Gildenburghesque (1-2m). After floating on the surface for a while to acclimatise to the conditions (rather different to the tropics where Clare learnt) we submerged, gradually we worked up to a half mask clear but couldn't get any further. Eventually we gave up and went for a short underwater swim, which revealed a lot of silt-covered kelp but nothing else. Given that the viz really was absolutely terrible, we were able to hover at 1.3m (give or take 0.1m) with no visual references. We surfaced shortly afterwards.

I have since been told that the reason for the bad viz is that the Seacat ferry stirs up all the silt with its wash as it leaves harbour.

We returned to our tried and tested dive site for a beach barbecue, which went well, apart from the seagulls eating half of the swiss roll that we'd bought for pudding.

Hoping for a good dive in the twilight (8:41pm) Daryl and I walked down the beach into the water. We submerged and swam around the rocks in about 1-2m of water, as we were so shallow there was quite a reasonable surge which meant that we got washed around a bit as we were peering into various holes, nearly all of which contained a small crab.

Eventually getting tired of being pushed around we made our way out towards deeper water and came across, Pollack, a Gold Sinney Wrasse, and the ubiquitous Ballan Wrasse. On the sea bed there was quite a lot of sponges and anemones on the exposed rocks. The kelp fronds had quite a lot of membrinipera on them but I couldn't find any nudibranchs. A little further on we found a lobster in a hole, as we had our faces rather close to the entrance we backed off when it decided to move forwards.

After spotting a couple of large Velvet crabs we surprised a large lobster walking around in the open and followed it back to its hole. After 40mins we surfaced directly off the beach (a result of some navigation combined with a fair sprinkling of luck!). Floating on my stab, I added a bit of air to my suit to get comfortable and began to swim in. Immediately I got a sharp pain in my left buttock, tried to swim again...ouch that hurts!!!! Not feeling that this justified a full scale "diver in distress on the surface" signal, I substituted saying "err.... Daryl, I think something's stuck in my bum, can you see anything sharp sticking through my suit?"

This didn't seem very likely as my otterskin drysuit is practically bomb proof [*Webmaster's note: This "bomb-proof" drysuit mysteriously developed a half-inch tear within a couple of months - bet Tom wishes he hadn't written that :-)*], also I could feel it moving!!!

Daryl towed me in, (I gave the surface cover a halfhearted distress signal, as they were looking rather curious!) My kit was stripped off and I carefully stood up trying to avoid annoying whatever it was that was in my suit, I then edged my way sideways up the beach and stripped off my suit and undersuit.

Three large red lumps on my bum gave credence to my story but it was only when we turned my undersuit inside out that I found a large black beetle running around inside it. Apparently the red colour of my undersuit lining would be especially attractive to beetles, and according to my brother, the beetle we found doesn't just bite it injects acid!

A sterling testimony to CUUEG's rescue skills.

Thursday 1st July

Diving with Daryl again we made an epic exploration of practically the whole dive site. We entered from the beach and explored the gully

finding a couple of velvet and small edible crabs, before working our way back into the bay.

As we finned along the west side of the bay a Ballan Wrasse and a Polack swam by, we then swam across the bay on an easterly compass bearing and explored the rocks there. Not a lot seemed to be happening and the tide was going out so we surfaced due to lack of water!

After lunch, in order to confirm my reputation for ruthless persecution, Clare and I did another marathon mask clearing session. This took quite a while but we worked all the way up to remove and replace. A short exploratory dive revealed a lobster, a couple of wrasse and a Polack.

In order to complete Clare's crossover we now had to find a dive site with 10m of water! Asking for suggestions at the dive shop they recommended that we tried Porth Dafarch on the far side of the bay, this turned out to be a sandy beach with its own toilet block and an EC blue flag.

Having kitted up it was about 200 yds to the sea where we entered backwards through the surf, a long fin out then followed before dropping down into a whole 2m of water! Finning along the bottom in the surge, sand eels kept shooting up out of the bottom and darting past us, very surreal.

The temptation to try and pull ourselves along the bottom was muted by a weaver fish, which at the point of nearly being run over swam off a little way and flashed its venomous spine menacingly!

Eventually the bottom started to rise again so we gave up and swam over to the side of the bay where the surge was too severe for it to be safe to poke around in the holes. Giving it up as a bad job we swam back into the middle of the bay and surfaced, after which there was a long surface swim in and a long walk back to the car!

(Apparently if you swim right out of the bay there is a wreck just round to the right)

As we still had some air left in our cylinders we decided to have another go at the far side of the island. Daryl and I climbed down the steps to the water in the dusk and slipped into the water. We were rewarded with a couple of Ballan Wrasse who swam up to take an interest, a Pollack, a number of dragonettes which zipped away over the bottom as we approached and several crabs. When our computers read 10.2m we turned back and spotted four sizeable velvet crabs within 2m of each other, all of which were looking at us with beady red eyes. On the way back a female cuckoo wrasse swam up to take a look at us and eventually we surfaced and swam back to the steps.

Clare's car had struggled to drag the two of us and the kit we'd brought up with us over various hills, so the chances of it managing three people and even more kit seemed slim. Unfortunately Richard had to leave tonight so we decided that the best plan was for Richard to take Daryl back to Chester with him where he could catch the (cheaper) train. This also meant that Clare's crossover (the longest in CUUEG history) could be finished off with another dive the next day. Nothing could possibly go wrong....

Friday 2nd July

Errr...yes it could, the battery could be completely flat. Eventually we managed to get a jump start and make our way down to the Treaddur bay.

We dropped in on the far side of the island and swam out on a compass bearing, stopping only to chase a Goby. When we reached 10m we floated up to 6m and hovered there for a minute, before swimming back in for Controlled buoyant lift (CBL) practice in 6m of water.

Once the SMB had been tied off Clare took three attempts before producing a nice controlled CBL. We then swam back to the gully, where we surfaced as our air was getting rather low. Seeing the training opportunity I got Clare do a tow without AV- lazy, me? Never!

The drive back was notable for having to get a jump start every time we needed to fill up with petrol or, when the engine stalled (in a deserted car park, or town centre). However we reached Cambridge at about 1:30am. On my answer phone was a message that I needed to be at the bus station for 7:50am to catch the plane for the trip in Scapa flow. So I chucked all my dirty clothes in the washer and hung my kit out to dry. After which I returned to the laundry to fling my clothes in the dryer, set my alarm for 6:30, and went to bed.

Saturday 3rd July

I woke up to the sound of my radio coming on and thought, that's funny I don't remember setting that to come on... oh ****! It was 7:30! I rapidly (and carefully) flung a complete set of diving gear into a bag. I flinging on a set of clothes I chucked the rest of the dry washing into another bag and set out across Cambridge, diving gear in one hand, clothes in another, and my drysuit bag in my mouth! Trying to thumb a rather urgent lift failed and just when I was getting to the point of cursing the entire driving population of Cambridge a car stopped and the bloke asked me where I needed to go- In a Geordie accent!!!

Needless to say I got to the bus station 30 seconds after the bus had left, attempts to get a taxi failed, but Cat Everard was still there and she gave me a lift. The obligatory motorway accident and traffic jam was on the other carriageway. And we arrived at Stanstead in good time for the flight, to discover all the fire alarms going off and fire engines dashing everywhere!

These minor problems were resolved however and roughly 26 hours later I was dropping onto the Bow of the cruiser SMS Coln. That, however, is another story...

