



Farne Islands 23rd - 25th June 1999

[Trip Report Index](#)

Divers...



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Thankfully we received sponsorship from British Viton products, manufacturers of 'O' rings for this trip with Stan Hall. As a result we decided to use as many of their products over the next 3 days as possible. We started well on the first day when an 'O' ring blew on a cylinder as we were filling it. The escaping air quickly emptied half a dustbin full of cooling water over John Rubinstein and myself. Over the following days we managed to lose, swap, trash or otherwise abuse countless more of the little rubber rings.

Day 1

The first dive was a shallow wall dive to get people back into the water. No-one can remember what the site was called but it was very nice. A number of pairs saw seals during this dive. Ida and myself happened across three sleeping in a kelp filled gully. They were unimpressed about being woken up and promptly left without excuses.

The second dive was a reef a little way from the islands. Again no-one can remember the name, or the name of the wrecked vessel at the spot. The reef walls were covered in yellow and white soft coral and the 12m visibility made the shear walls very impressive. Various groups found seals. The most friendly of our agile visitors was sneaking up behind Tom. It promptly vanished when Tom turned around. I had picked up the thick stem from some kelp to see if, like dogs, seals would chase sticks. With the sudden lack of seals I resorted to beating Tom around the head with the floppy end of the stick.

Various underwater organisms were spotted including a large white nudibranch, a LARGE sunstar and a big octopus in a crevice. At least Ida and I think it was an octopus but short of TNT I do not think there was any way we could persuade it out into the open to have proper look.

Day 2

The third dive was on the "Hopper", a gully and rock system famed for seals and the impressive scenic diving. Ida and myself entered the seal filled gully to discover the seals had buggered off (all except one which exited as I pointed it out to Ida). We set off along the bottom of the cliff and saw lots of good stuff including another seal buggering off. Other pairs fared better and at least one pair of fins were tried for taste by a young seal. The dive was also notable for the fact that three buddy pairs found a lost weightbelt identical to Tom's at 15m. Images of a Polaris ascent came to mind dashed by the sad realisation that Tom was on the boat with his weightbelt.

The fourth dive was on the Pinnacles. Stan had stated that at the bottom of the cliff was the 'odd bit of wreckage' stretching out to 26m. The odd bit of wreckage turned out to be 8-9 tennis courts worth of flattened hull, boilers, pipes and other rusty junk. At this point Nick discovered that James Harper followed John Rubinstein's example when it came to wildlife diving. The Rubinsteinian approach is to discover a new marine creature and prod it to see what self defence mechanisms it has. Nick realised this when closely inspecting a short pipe with a huge edible crab inside. James started throwing rocks at the crab from the other end so that when the crab got bored of this game it quickly exited

the pipe at Nicks end 3 inches from his nose.

At this point I must relate the sad truth about the hellraising antics of CUUEG once evening arrived. It was not so much 'larger louts on tour' as OAPs on Prozac. The first person went to bed at 8:30pm followed by the rest at 9:30. Still, the 10 hours sleep did mean that everyone was up at the correct time for the final day.

Day 3

We had to be in the water at 9:30am for slack water over the wreck of the Somali and we were only 10 minutes late. A new student record. The Somali was a 7000 ton vessel sunk in 28m of water. I do not know the details but she went down with a cargo of pipes, pressure vessels, cement, film and brass shaving kits still on board. We had arrived on the first night of our trip to be told that students from a certain university in Nottinghamshire had been diving the wreck the previous day and had stayed down too long. They had to make a fast ascent due to lack of air. Needless to say I was keen that all should go well. It did and we all had an enjoyable dive on something that resembled a ship even after 50 years, thousands of divers and a recent illegal salvage operation.

For lunch we went back to the Longstone lighthouse where we had been the previous day. This pleased certain members of the boat who suffer from "Mal de Mer". In the whole trip we only had one person who needed to closely examine the sides of the vessel, although a few looked rather green on the first day.

The shallow water around the lighthouse harbour allowed some snorkelling. In this way seals could be closely inspected and photographed.



Awwwwww!

The final dive was on the Blue Caps. This was another wall dive. Apart from the outstanding consumption of 'O' rings little had gone wrong on the trip so far. John Rubinstein and Tom saw their chance to change this when my Cam-band came lose on entry to the water. Rather than re-assemble my kit and pass it back to me to start the dive they decided to pull my regulator to pieces. Their sabotage plan was foiled when I managed to re-assemble my reg on the deck of the boat with only modest amounts of swearing. Everyone seemed to enjoy the dive although the only notable event was Ida managing to miss the Mother of all lobsters in a crevice. This was despite my shining a torch at it, Ida shining a torch at it and the lobster moving. She explained after she was wondering why I was so interested in some piddly 2 inch long fish which also happened to be in the hole.

After the final dive, a plan was hatched for John Kendall to phone up Sam (to whom Sam has never spoken) and pretend to be from the BBC requesting a comment about the two Cambridge University divers reported missing earlier that day. Sadly common-sense prevailed and no call was made