



**Weymouth**  
**15-16th October 1999**

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## Trip Report by Sam Cockerill

### The Divers:

- Sam Cockerill
- James Harper
- James Anderson
- Philip Rae
- Ed Coney
- John Rubinstein

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Weymouth offers a good variety of sites all year round, but after having dived here several times this summer I was looking forward to something further afield. Alas, it was not to be; a force 6 breeze out in the channel was pounding waves over the breakwater when we arrived on Friday. It looked like our hopes for a dive on the M2 sub would be put on hold again for the dubious delights of the sheltered harbour area, and we consoled ourselves with a few hours of quiet reflection in the hotel's all-night bar.

### HMS Hood

Our timing is greatly improved on last time, and we drop down near the bow section in near slack conditions. Visibility is a foggy 4m, but this improves in the lee of the ship's structure and inside the wreck. Reeling off my SMB line, James A and I head single file into the stern section. We pick our way through two rooms being careful to avoid stirring up the silt with our fins, before our surroundings are illuminated by the dim blue haze of sunlight filtering in through perforations in the port side. Guided by our wreck line, we return into the blackness to our entrance.

With the turning of the tide, the visibility begins to deteriorate as the dirty water of an hour ago is washed back over us.

### The Countess of Earne

Although the Countess is more accessible than the Hood, the absence of any tidal flow has left a thick layer of silt over the whole wreck, which is dislodged by the slightest brush. Several of the holds we swim through bear cloudy witness to the prior passage of divers.

A huge John Dory, one of the few I've seen, saunters casually around on deck. When he realises he's being stalked he slips into one such cloud and vanishes.

We find a clean cartilage skull, possibly of a dogfish. This may have been a meal for the seal we spotted here in August, certainly the scraps of skin clinging on seem quite fresh. I contemplate fetching this out, but conclude that any ornamental merits would be outweighed by a less than appealing aurora. We later find that Phil, on spotting the same skull, concluded otherwise. After 12 hours in our warm bunkroom the fishy aurora was quite overwhelming.

### The Bottlebank

During the '50s and '60s this site was used by the navy for dumping surplus equipment, and consequently regularly yields surprises to the observant diver. A cross between an archaeological dig and a landfill fly-by, it is not long before John and I start turning up treasure.

It isn't until I have both arms piled full of plates, bowls, forks, milk bottles and the odd clam shell that I decide a little rationalisation is required. After applying the "would I pick this out of the bin" rule, I am left with a borderline bowl, although John insists on keeping his forks (presumably to bring to the next cueque dinner).

We encounter several swimming crabs, eyeing us suspiciously from beneath assorted piles of junk. After a comically inept attempt to gently pick one up, my catch latches cartoon style to my index finger with a determined nip. It takes several vigorous shakes as I scream with surprise before he is persuaded of his victory over me. As he flicks off sideways he leaves John and I creased in two, masks flooded with uncontrolled laughter.

### The Bombardon unit

Our final dive takes us back to the bizarre concrete and steel matrix of the Bombardon unit. Our strategy - first pair in and straight past the

landing craft to arrive here for the best of the viz - pays off and we are treated to several hazy swim-throughs. Sadly I am no closer to picturing what this craft may have looked like afloat.

The resident shoal of sea bass is still here, and we spy on them through the rusted holes in the superstructure panels. One of these holes seems large enough to swim through into a small compartment , and a similar hole beyond creates a tempting tunnel.

I offer John first passage whilst the visibility is undisturbed and check his straps are not caught as he edges his way through. John is half-way in when he stops, although I can't make out anything snagged. I grab him by the shins to offer some encouragement, and we are enveloped by a swelling ball of silt with just my head and his fins protruding.

It occurs to me that this would be a particularly awkward way to start an incident report; " I was wedging John head first into a jagged metal hole and did not realise at first that he was in distress, as the visibility was minimal and our only contact was through my grip on his ankles..."

John reverses, later admitting the cause of his hesitation to be his misapprehension that I was trying to pull him out. I relay my incident report wording, and once again we both drop to the silt in a mask-flooding fit of giggles.

After an aborted investigation of a rope leading to no-where, we meet Ed, James H, Phil and James A and mischievously send them off along said rope into the murk with gesticulated suggestions of a magnificent, but sadly imaginary underwater feature. Our masks flood immediately.

I feel a momentary pang of guilt when Ed and James surface after having searched for our mythical wreck over 200 yards away.