



**Plymouth
Mountbatten Watersports Centre
5-7th November 1999**

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The lads and lasses:

- Mike "No way, I'm not ****ing in my suit" McCarthy
- James "Where's that rope gone?" Anderson
- Tom "I had it a minute ago" Riley
- Sam "Do **NOT** go in there" Cockerill
- Christian "Land is lovely" Kramer
- Ida "Ignorance is bliss" Lister
- Daryl "The ear" Spelman
- Ed "Cool Car" Coney

Friday 5th November

Don't go diving in November they said, it'll be too rough they said, the viz will be crap they said.... Okay so by and large they were right, but it was still great fun, and it wasn't cold- a totally tropical 13.5C.

Standing outside the kit-store on Friday night with 16 cylinders and several large dive bags laid out on the pavement it was looking dicey whether we would all fit. (we'd already sent Mike down with James on the train)

Ed arrived with a squeal of burning rubber, in his "new" (less antique) car. We shoved eight cylinders in the boot, filled up the back seat with the O2 kit and other junk- and then discovered that there was no suspension left. One cylinder removed and he looked happy (well perhaps not..).

Sam was there soon after and we had a suitably jaw dropping moment at the sight of another eight cylinders to go in his boot. Luckily we managed to get them in, and the dive kit went into the trailer, although it would later be realised that he'd put his own stuff in the boot!

The drive down was fairly uneventful, although accompanied by fireworks, and after a brief tour of Plymouth we reached the Mountbatten Watersports centre. Having finally convinced the bloke on the gate that we weren't CU sailing club or here for the O₂ admin course and reached the bar (just after it had closed) to find Mike and James comparing contemplating their pints, and relaying tales of drunk Scotsmen. After a few pleading looks the bar was re-opened and we joined them.

Feeling rather tired, and having secured the gear we went to bed to dream of tomorrow's delights.

Saturday 6th November

Shortly after discovering that the sailors had anointed the men's loo in fine fashion we made our way down to an excellent slap up breakfast at 7:30 before going off to meet Glen for nine. (I then discovered I'd left my suit behind and ran back to grab it)

With the boat loaded, Glen asked what we were thinking of doing that morning, I ventured the James Eagan Layne (as we'd planned) Glen sucked his teeth and said "OK" without much enthusiasm, "Well, that is, what would you recommend?" I asked, surrendering.

(NB- It is well known that the boat skipper nearly always knows more about the area than any of the divers- In dive marshal training this is called "using local knowledge")

Having established that we would dive Hilsea point instead, we made our way out in a steadily falling wind and rolled in confident that the forecast for a calm afternoon and Sunday would be proved correct.

We soon discovered that the viz really was quite atrocious, torch and strobe on Mike and I made our way around the rock in around 12m looking for a drop off to about 20, which we never found. Although we couldn't see very far we did see elephant's ear sponge, a sea cucumber, "edible" sea urchins and a few fish (which made a run for it when they suddenly spotted us a metre away). At 27mins we began our ascent, using a DSMB did a 3min safety stop at 6m, took another minute to surface, and was faced with a 2.5m wave coming straight at us!

Let's just say that the Met. Office got it wrong, sloshing around in the biggest sea I've personally ever been diving in I hoped that the DSMB

had been spotted. Mike tried to get my flag out but couldn't manage it in his gloves. Fortunately Glen spotted us and a strenuous climb up the ladder deposited us in the boat. Everyone else was efficiently recovered and hot tea was distributed (I'm sure this would have been very nice, but a large wave deposited more than a fair share of salt in mine, so I passed)

Lunch when it came was in a calm sheltered bay which was dryer and also made eating worthwhile.

The second dive was on a little dived and much broken up old wreck, but at least it was sheltered.

Ida and I dropped down the shot to the bottom and had a look at the wreckage, following a hawser off to one side. Shortly we came across a large tube which Mike and James were taking an interest in, finning to the end we found a crab sitting inside it. On our way back Mike and James courteously moved out of the way and we went past. Apparently they then lost contact with the tube and despite a square search didn't manage to find it (well you know it was only 12' long). Eventually they gave up and finned over bare rock for a while before finding more wreckage much to their delight.

Knowing nothing of this Ida and I continued to make our way around the wreck discovering a huge anchor. Then vengeance struck and looking at my gauges for a second, I lost the cable I'd been following. Luckily we found it again after a couple of minutes. We finned around for a bit and then decided to make our way back to the shot to ascend.

Back on shore we left the cylinders to be filled, packed the gear (and my shoes!) into the wheelhouse and went back to the centre.

Deciding to avoid the drunken Scotsmen that evening we went for a curry down on the Barbican (guided via mobile phone by my brother) and eventually ended up with a perfectly reasonable curry.

Sleep was delayed until about midnight by a disco beneath our window, reception would later tell me that I should have known this as they had told me when I booked that they would be "busy"....

Sunday 8th November

Christian had told me that if it looked rough when he looked out of the window in the morning he wouldn't be coming. As it was the harbour was almost glassy smooth, so another slap up breakfast later we left the harbour and made our way out into a not quite so calm sea.

A couple of hours later we arrived at the Eddystone, impressively built on what really is a small piece of rock.

Glen pointed out a couple of Dan buoys marking a net to the SE of the island. Whilst the current would be washing around to the north. Deciding that I'd rather take my chances with current than net, Ida and I dropped in and headed north. Lots of small wrasse (Rock Cook, Ballan, and female Cuckoo) swam around us and a large silvery Pollack came quite close. I found a Dogfish, and contemplated catching it and shooting at Ida, but decided to be kind and let it swim off.

A bit further on we found a rope looking suspiciously clean looking up we saw a huge mono-filament net stretching up from the bottom- we backed off rapidly!

Turning round we went back and warned Sam and Mike before turning to play with the fish. Eventually we decided it was time to come up and shot off the DSMB. A perfect buoyancy controlled ascent then followed (even if I do say so myself!)

Lunch consisted of the remains of yesterdays as we hadn't had time to buy anything else, we weren't feeling like much more (even Sam's traditional remarks on hurling and projections were noticeably absent).

The last dive was on the James Eagan Layne, I'd done this dive in bad Viz. before and thought that it would be much better if you could see your fins whilst you were doing it. I still do.

Daryl and Christian sat this one out, Sam and buddy rolled in got to the shot and dropped straight down, missing the wreck to Glens disgust. However this was all part of his plan- Landing directly on top of a large shot belt, despite completely filling his DSMB there wasn't enough lift to send it up. Also not wanting to be bombed from above if the air spilled on surfacing he guided it around for the rest of the dive before depositing it into the boat.

Glen had aimed to drop the shot on the sand on the upstream side of the wreck so that the tide and tugs of divers going down it would drag it into the bow. Ida and I were last pair down and charged with clearing the shot. Reaching the wreck we discovered that Glen had actually scored a direct hit and the weight had gone through a hole in the deck into one of the holds. Luckily it wasn't a very big weight and we were able to haul it onto the deck and leave it clear of the wreck.

Swimming off in about 1m of viz., aiming to find the ships gunwale, we came to a straight edge and dropped down what (we thought) was the ships side. After about 5m of descent I realised that we were actually descending down a pillar, reaching the bottom I realised that we'd gone down into one of the holds, turning round I signalled "up" to Ida and carefully followed the pillar back up.

Making sure I'd found the side of the ship we dropped over it and made our way down, past a few deadmens fingers. Looking up we could see the dark sharp outline of the deck surrounded by green murk, pretty impressive.

We continued down but at 20m it was getting very dark indeed and we contoured round before coming back up along the break in the hull and swimming along the deck. We didn't quite reach the bow before it was time to shoot of the DSMB and ascend.

Afterwards we returned to the harbour, washed the kit off and filled the cylinders for next weeks training session. Sam and Christian decided to be hard boys and have an unheated shower under the sprays rigged up along the quayside.

Another uneventful drive home saw us in Cambridge by 2130.

Thanks guys for a great trip.