



**Portland Harbour
Breakwater Diving Centre
11-13 June 2000**

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Trip Report by Iain Smith

Divers (all two of them!):

- Iain Smith
- Cat Everard

Sunday 11 June

Having discovered that I wasn't going to be subjected to a viva, Cat and I decided to celebrate by going diving. This was consequently a last minute, make-it-up-as-you-go-along trip. This, perhaps, explained some of the mishaps we had to deal with...! Having seen Sam's report raving about Breakwater Diving Centre's 2-day package, we decided to give it a try, and gave them a call at 0800 the following morning. 10 hours later, having made some sort of attempt to sort our lives out post-exams, we arrived in Portland.

We decided that as Cat had been out of the water for more than six months it would be sensible to have a shake-down dive on our own, in order to avoid making fools of ourselves on the boat. We had hoped to dive Chesil Beach (on the east of Portland Bill), but "Budgie", the owner of Breakwater, thought it was probably "a bit lumpy". Instead, we staggered down the beach next to the hotel and flopped into the water.

Dive 1 - "Clusterf-k Cove"

Not worth logging.

Oh dear. What went wrong on this dive? More to the point, what didn't? Firstly we both forgot that salt water diving requires extra weight. While getting some more, Cat aggravated the lower back injury sustained when I had hit her with a Landrover some months previously. By the time we were sorted out, we turned back to the water, to see my SMB floating slowly across the mooring area. Once recovered, Cat flooded her brand new dryglove. After this little catalogue of disasters, it was perhaps unsurprising that our collective grasp of buoyancy control decided to take a holiday. Having popped up from 4m two or three times, we had had enough and decided to give up and take our chances on the morn.

Monday 12 June

Dive 2 - Landing Craft and Bombardon Unit

Time Down: 0924

Time Up: 1019

Max Depth: 16.5m

Viz: 5m

Some would describe our decision to proceed with the planned dive as utterly foolhardy in light of the previous night's drama. These individuals would be absolutely right. However, fortune smiled upon us, and we had a very enjoyable dive. Firstly, let me defend *Saracen* against Sam's previous scorn - or maybe they'd just pumped up the tubes! Descending the shotline, we arrived at the bow of the Landing Craft. During our exploration of it, we both found ourselves remembering the opening scenes from *Saving Private Ryan*. However, there was nothing particularly interesting on the craft, so we contoured along the harbour wall at 14m to the Bombardon Unit. Like Sam before me, I have no idea what this most peculiarly shaped hunk of metal actually looked like, or how it worked. The nearest I can get to a description is that it looks like a Ten Armies piece from the boardgame *Risk*, lying on its side. Coming back along the unit on the far side from the harbour wall, we the other pair, one of whom was having great fun creating silt-clouds. We chose another route.

Back at the Landing Craft, Cat spotted a garden of sand eels. If you imagine a forest of red, stereotypical periscopes then you will have a fairly good idea of what they looked like. On seeing us, "Down Periscope!" and they were gone.

Between dives, a rolling fog descended over Portland, obscuring the top of the hill. Unsure whether we were going to get to dive, we wandered into town, and found a lovely cafe, clearly designed with divers in mind, which served lovely large portions.

Dive 3 - *Countess of Earn*

Time Down: 1631

Time Up: 1712

Max Depth: 14.0

Viz: 1-10m

Once Budgie had decided that the fog wasn't going to go away, but neither was it coming down, Cat and I started to kit up. We took a little longer to get organised than planned. For no apparent reason, my backup DV started freeflowing (having previously behaved perfectly). Switching it with Cat's spare octopus, we found that that didn't work either. In desperation, I began to strip my DV down, at which point Budgie offered me the use of his...except that my tank was a DIN, and his reg was a yoke. After several hose rearrangements, whose details are lost in confusion, we managed to put together three working first-stage/demand valve pairs and did the dive. Which turned out to be a lot better the inauspicious start predicted. [For anyone who cares - come that evening, I put all the regs back together again...and they all worked.]

I can't remember whether the *Countess* was a tanker or a cargo vessel. Nonetheless, she is a big ship, sitting the right way up, with four interesting-looking holds open to the surface. The holds second and third from the front form two ends of a very wide swim-through. Several huge fish on the wreck (or at least, I thought they were huge at the time - the Red Sea trip has put something of a damper on the memory!). The viz was variable but was described as "excellent" for this site.

In the evening, following Sam's recommendation in his trip report (Yes, some of us do actually read them!) we tried to have dinner at the Abbotsbury Oyster Bar...except that it was shut. Absolutely starving, we headed for the nearest pub, the Ferrybridge Inn. Good move. The food was absolutely exquisite, at entirely sensible prices. I especially recommend the "Death by White Chocolate". Forget the diets!

Tuesday 13 June

Dive 4 - Outside Harbour Wall

Time Down: 1124

Time Up: 1154

Max Depth: 17.0

Viz: 10m

This was a fairly gentle drift dive off Breakwater's hard boat, *Top Gun*. At the start, we saw a crab pot, with the mother of all spider crabs in it. Guess someone had a good dinner! Fairly grey dive, with not much else of interest, except for spotters like me, who noticed that the fighter silhouette on *Top Gun* was that of an F16 Falcon, rather than an F14 Tomcat.

Dive 5 - *HMS Hood*

Time Down: 1416

Time Up: 1455

Max Depth: 14.9

Viz: 5-10m

The *Hood* was sunk across the southern entrance to the harbour wall, as a blockship. Described by a former commander as, "A bitch to the last", she very inconsiderately sank upside down. The superstructure is entirely buried in sand. However, recent reports suggest that it is possible to penetrate deep inside her, and end up well below the seabed. Needless to say, this was not a dive plan which appealed to us! Instead, we planned to dive the outside, and look into some of the holes in the hull.

We had hoped to dive at slack water, but were delayed some 45 minutes due to a PADI instructor who seemed convinced that her status enabled her to turn back the tide and therefore had time to finish a theory lesson she was teaching. As a result we ended up with a strong current through the wreck. Being pushed away from a wreck by current would be annoying, but this one seemed determined to suck us into the Hood through the gaping rents in her side. At this point, Cat discovered that her regs couldn't deliver enough air, took a fairly bad carbon dioxide hit and called the dive. I attempted to pop up a DSMB, at which point my reel broke. Good things about the dive included a scorpionfish sitting outside a porthole (or where it once would have been) and sparring with a very large spider crab.

Subsequent adjustment showed that Cat's regs were incredibly badly tuned. These regs were serviced at the same time, by the same people, as my reg which came back with a blown HP seat (see Tom's Malta trip report, if he ever gets round to writing it!). Curiously enough, I won't be sending kit back to that service centre!

Despite the various problems, we had a very enjoyable couple of days. Lessons were learned. Kit problems were sorted out and we drove away from the South Coast looking forward to an excuse to come back and, more immediately, to the Egypt trip.

