



## Portland Harbour Weymouth 29 September - 1 October 2000

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This is a somewhat lengthy trip report, covering all aspects of what went on over the weekend. Anyone who is only interested in the dives should click on the appropriate link to skip to the description of the dives themselves:

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## The Cast

### CUUEG Divers

- Iain "Conger" Smith (DL)
- John "Where the F\*\*k has the DO gone now?" Kendall (DL)
- Ida "Fish Feeding Pie Girl" Lister (SD)
- Cat "Hydraulic Lift" Everard (SD)
- James "Pastry Chef" Donnelly (SD)
- Zine Parker (SD), star of "Deer Hunter II: The Navigator"

### CamBSAC Divers

- Emma "Pink" Faid (AD)
- Neil "Tigger" Burgess (SD)



Back: John, Emma, Zine, Iain, Neil.  
Front: James, Ida.

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## Prologue

Extract from Joining Instructions v1.0:

"Equipment: Meet on Wednesday to sort out your kit, so we can pick it up and go  
Timings: Meeting outside the Panton Arms, Panton St. at 1700 (or as close to as possible), for rapid departure.  
Loading plan: [everyone in two cars]"

In the 36 hours prior to departure, the following messages were received:

Emma: "Finish work at 1800, will be round shortly afterwards"

Neil: "Finish work around 1800, will be round shortly afterwards"

John: "Will be slightly late"

Cat [for Iain]: "Will be somewhat late"

Zine: "Will be in at work in London until 1800. Will meet you there. Can you put together some kit for me, please?"

Emma: "Have had a 'mare of a day. Can you collect me on the way out of Cambridge, please?"

Events:

*Mid-morning Friday, Iain phones Breakwater to confirm that we are expected and that the weather is favourable for the Inshore package, with the possibility of upgrading to Offshore. Once the new computer booking system is ignored, and the original sheets of paper located, everything is determined to be in order, and the weather favourable. Breakwater promise to phone in the event of any changes.*

*At about 1540, Iain is about to leave Addenbrooke's, when he checks his email and discovers that he has a supervision 10 minutes ago. Eventually leaves Addenbrooke's at 1730, and arrives at the kit store in record time, having found that most car drivers will genuinely try to avoid cyclists who show respect for neither the Law nor personal safety, to find James and Ida waiting patiently. In a remarkable demonstration of efficiency (at least by CUUEG standards!) the pre-packed kit is dragged out. Iain then runs around trying to ensure that the requisite number of SMBs and DSMBs has been taken and that he has packed everything Zine needs. Ida then remembers that she hasn't brought her knife, and disappears. At 1815, John arrives and sorts his life out. Ida reappears. Neil arrives and the "Tonka Toy" is loaded, amid much bouncing up and down from Neil, who is clearly addicted to diving! Many cyclists irritated (by the vehicle, not by the bouncing!). Cat calls to say she is stuck in traffic. Neil, Ida and James depart to collect Emma. Cat arrives. More cyclists irritated. Most of the kit has been loaded when a car demands we move to allow him passage. Vehicle taken for a spin around the block. Remaining kit loaded. Convoy consolidates at Emma's, eventually departing Cambridge approximately 1900.*

*At 2200, Zine calls to say she has reached Fleet services. At this point she is roughly 45min behind the main body.*

*2300: Main Body arrive at Aquasport Hotel, to discover that apparently only 1 x 5 person room has been booked. Much muttered cursing by Iain who knew perfectly well this was rubbish. It subsequently transpires that, not only have the requisite number of rooms been booked, but that Iain appears to be sleeping in 5 places Bed-hopping is one thing, but that is ridiculous! Order is eventually brought to the confused sheets of paper at Reception. It is then found that group has been booked on the Local package. Reference to a different set of papers gives the lie to this. However, apparently the weather forecast is such that only local diving will be possible. Neil stops bouncing. Emma and Iain privately agree to have words with the skipper the following day, with a view to staging a mutiny. In the interim, it is decided to have a shakedown dive on Chesil Beach first thing in order to avoid appearing too much like a toolbox of spanners once on the boat.*

*0030: Iain attempts to contact Zine, who receives the Quote of the Day Award:*

*"Where are you?"*

*"I'm not sure where I am. But I think I've just seen a sign to Weymouth, so I'm not lost."*

*0130: Zine calls to say she has arrived, by now some three and a half hours late. Iain takes the call while attempting to separate his fingers, which have been superglued together while trying to attach a new pocket to his drysuit.*

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## **ACT I - SATURDAY 31 OCTOBER 2000**

Saturday dawns and the Chesil Beach group assemble for breakfast. Zine appears, and announces that henceforth her parents will refer to her as "Mud". Knowledge of the Green Cross Code has not yet reached the deer population of the South Coast, and stepping out in front of moving traffic cost one its life, and Zine a 10" dent and ripped off back bumper. Nonetheless, spirits are not too low, until we look at the sea-state. Flat as a millpond.

With images of what might have been, aspersions are cast on the parentage of weather forecasters. We decide to delay our Chesil Beach dive, in the hope that we can appeal to the skipper's better nature and resurrect our dreams of diving the Aeolian Sky.

In this, we are disappointed...

"Too much water moving out there", explains Budgie, "I'd prefer to try something west of the Bill",

Emma's and Iain's eyes meet. Hardly daring to hope, Iain asks, "Any suggestions?"

"M2?" suggests Budgie, "Though you will need to be ready to leave at 12, rather than 1."

After a very brief discussion as to whether we really need to have a work-up, Chesil Beach is summarily abandoned. Neil is bouncing once more!

### **Scene 1 - The M2 - dreams do come true.**

While we prepare our kit, we have a conversation with three other divers. "M2?" they say. "Lucky you. We're booked on that tomorrow." Cat, meantime, is having a hard time getting into her drysuit. In response to a rude comment from John, suggesting we should get a hydraulic lift to hold the suit up while she drops into it, it is pointed out that the problem is (inevitably!) entirely Iain's fault, who, last year, took the instructions to measure her for a "skin-tight" suit rather too literally. Punishment appears to be being wreaked upon him by some Higher Being, as the Weymouth Equipment Curse strikes him again. Despite every piece of kit having worked both days in Gildenburgh the previous weekend, his primary DV starts to hiss quietly when the tank is turned on. A quick twist of an Allen key appears to solve the problem. Then

the contents gauge on his deco reg starts dumping his £4.50 Nitrox fill into the air. Fortunately one of his "always carried, but never used" pieces of kit steps into the breach, and a button gauge is screwed into the first stage, while everyone falls about laughing. Finally, he discovers that his lamp has stopped working.

On board Top Gun, Breakwater's hard boat, we are joined by three "technical" divers. Alongside their showerhead Poseidon Jetstream regs, Dive Rite Transpac II bondage wings and every gizmo and gadget available, Iain's 3L stage of Nitrox 50 looks positively recreational!

The trip out to the *M2* is comparatively uneventful. Iain spells out in graphic detail precisely what injuries he will inflict on anyone attempting to penetrate this War Grave, which is met by general approval and offers of assistance. The sea is slightly lumpy, and a number of the divers decide that the inside of their eyelids causes less conflict with their balance organs and thus less trauma to their stomachs. Iain, meantime, is up by the wheelhouse, getting more and more excited as we crash through the waves.

On site, Budgie declares the shot satisfactory on the second attempt. By this stage, the heat and movement is getting to people, and there is a scramble to be first in the water, after the "tekkies". We drop down the shot, finning against a slight current. Iain and Cat, the first CUUEG pair, are initially confused by the seabed, having read that the *M2* is like being on the deck of an in-service sub. It would have been worth remembering that the *M2* had a crew of only 60, and that boats the size of a modern boomer were not even a twinkle in the eye of the most enlightened designer of the age! After a brief interval, they realise that the shot has missed the wreck. Iain "senses, rather than feels" the shadow through the 4m viz, and they swim up to a metal wall rising up from the seabed. After two years of trying by various expeditions, two years of frustration for one Expedition Officer in particular, CUUEG's DO and Chairman are the first Branch members onto the *M2*.

Iain and Cat rise up onto the deck, and follow the hull, trying to establish an orientation. The give-away comes at right at the end, where two torpedo tubes are clearly visible on the port side of the knife-edged bow. We follow the hull aft, and see the darkness of the open door of the famous seaplane hanger looming out of the murk. With only one torch each, there is no thought of a quick tour of the inside. (Although sunk after the end of WWI, the *M2* is considered a War Grave. However, the access into the hull from the hanger has been sealed, and it is considered acceptable to look inside the hanger only.) Rising up past it, they see the derrick which would have been used to winch the plane back aboard. Further aft is the conning tower, which is well preserved. At this point, both are approaching their ascent pressure, and begin their ascent. At 20m, Iain switches to his Nitrox 50, and indicates to Cat that, in an OOA situation, she should still take the reg in his mouth. 5 seconds later, as he is mentally running over his deco schedule, the reg vanished from his mouth. Grabbing his necklaced backup DV, he checks Cat's air and DV, which appear to be working fine. It later transpires that Cat thought she was being invited to do an OOA skills practise! A DSMB is deployed from 15m and we continue a gradual ascent, working our way through some ten minutes of stops before surfacing.

John and Neil report seeing something, which might have been a gun, a little way forward of the hanger, while the "tekkies" mention that the screw (propeller) may still be in place. Neil has tried to pick a fight with a crab, which he firmly believes might have grown up in a hole, and have grown too large to get out. He mutters something about returning the following day with some plastic explosive, in order to get the thing out for dinner.

Ida and James, meantime, missed the wreck on their first pass, but nonetheless have time for a quick "fly-by" before they have to ascend.

After the dive, we see the true size of the Transpac wing. Ida, expecting an obscure, but enlightening, explanation, quietly mutters to Iain, "Why does he need a wing that size?" Iain attempts to minimise the number of expletives in his answer, while describing in great detail the microscopic intellect of the user. The term "stroke" was invented for this type of diver. These observations are borne out when we notice that, despite his buddy breathing his Nitrox 50 down to increase off-gassing, the first diver is attempting to use him as a windshield for lighting up.

Insult of the weekend:

"Iain, you see those tekkies?"

"Yes"

"Why do you want to be like them?"

The member of the party concerned will remain nameless, but they may consider themselves lucky not to have been thrown overboard to join Ida's breakfast.

## Scene 2 - The *Enecuri*/The *Spaniard*

The original plan to dive either the *Earl of Abergavenny* or the *Himalaya* as a second dive is discarded when Budgie describes them as being "all mud, and no wreck". To borrow a quote from a previous trip report, "In Dive Marshalling, this is referred to as 'taking advantage of local knowledge'". We decide on the *Spaniard*, as none of us have dived it before.

Somewhat broken, the stern of the *Enecuri* is identifiable by the massive propeller blades. However, one first has to realise that that is what they are! Iain notices that Cat has just swum past something vaguely familiar...then notices another...Aha! It's the screw. The blades are probably about 4-5' long, and make the prop that Iain and Devin recovered from the *Cam* look quite dinky in comparison! Other divers are pointed in its direction, as, other than the bow, it is about the only recognisable feature. Emma and Zine are being guided in that direction when they run out of dive time. Cat and Iain hover, while Emma prepares to send up a DSMB. Iain notices that Cat has drifted above Emma, and is probably just far enough above her to be out of sight. After frantic signalling, she moves aside, just in time to avoid being punched by the ascending buoy!

## Scene 3 - The Evening

Acting on recommendations from the reconnaissance of the Ferrybridge Inn earlier in the summer, we launch an attack on their cuisine. Miraculously, not even Iain or John attempt the 20oz steak, opting for fish instead. Ida, still feeling the effects of the morning, wails quietly, "I need a pie, a pie!", eventually being comforted when she spots the magic words, "Chicken Pie" on the menu. While ordering, the group are entranced by the singing, moving fish and crustaceans attached to the wall.

Desert is almost universally "Death by White Chocolate", though James suggests combining several of the dishes and creates the "Sticky Death by White Toffee Chocolate Treacle Pudding, served in a bucket on the side". Fortunately this hybrid monster of the dessert table remains purely hypothetical!

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## ACT II - SUNDAY 01 OCTOBER 2000

Today, the gods of tides, weather and health are against us. With particularly high tides, the *M2* is only diveable in the afternoon, by which stage we will have to be gone. The wind has got up, and we are restricted to the harbour for the morning, and Cat is confined to bed by a screaming headache, which has lasted since the ascent from the *M2*.

### Scene 1 - *HMS Hood*

This time, there is no instructor convinced that slack will wait for her to finish her theory lessons and we arrive on time. Down the shot, along the orange line, and there she is. Huge numbers of surprisingly lethargic fish are to be found under the overhangs, and Iain shepherds them out to Emma and Zine. Lack of advance planning means that there is a little confusion over whether to do any of the swim-throughs. At first, they are very tempting, but with 1 torch each, no redundant air source, and one drysuit inflator malfunction, the edge of the incident pit is looming a little too close for comfort. We make a pass along the bottom of the wreck, then attempt to come back shallow, but the holes just below us are far too interesting and we drop back down to peer inside. Coming back to the orange line, a brief discussion is held over whether to have a look over the top parts of the Hood. We decide that air is too low, and that we should leave. During this, slight confusion occurs over whether to pop up a DSMB, or to ascend the shot, either being acceptable. Emma bags off from the bottom, after which Iain is clearly shown to be too keen to rack up OWI time. Showing off by demonstrating the deployment of a tied-off DSMB, he also shows why it is a good idea not to attach the reel to loose bits of rope. Fortunately both ends were tethered and the reel only shot about 2m up before coming rest! With a degree of current now running, the three drift off into the murk. Emma's DSMB appears to get caught on something and is dragged out to a very shallow angle, though no explanation immediately presents itself as to the cause of this. We gradually reel in, being careful to avoid entanglement of SMB lines.

We have subsequently learned that on this dive, clearly still upset about his failure to extract the crab from the *M2*, Neil gave in to his primal hunter-gatherer instincts. John had pointed out a particularly fine spider crab, to which Neil thought, "Lunch!" Apparently John had forgotten to include anything about how to handle crustaceans under "Safety" in his dive brief and Neil seized the crab from behind. Unfortunately, crabs have the ability to seize things under their shells, and it instantly closed its legs around his hand. John commented later he had never heard somebody scream through a DV before! Unfortunately for Neil's stomach, the crab was hurled violently from his hand, with a gurgling of, "You bastard!...My DINNER!"

For future reference, Neil tell us that spider crabs should be picked up across the top of the shell.

Meantime, the RIB carrying our three friends from yesterday has limped back into harbour in sorry state. Rounding Portland Bill, the sea state deteriorated, and their attempt on the *M2* was aborted. Having turned round, they saw a 10' wave coming straight at them. With no way to avoid it, they took it bow-on, and tried to drive through it. The impact ruptured the front tube of the RIB. We extend our commiserations, while congratulating ourselves on not waiting for today!

### Scene 2 - *Countess of Erne*

Although Cat joined us on the boat, Iain was still a loose cannon, and "asked" John and Neil if they would mind him diving with them. We dropped down the shot to the stern of the Countess and continue to the seabed. Iain ducks under the hull, looking for the prop, and the turbulence of his passage lifts the bottom up. (Who said that he kicked the bottom up? Stand in the corner!) We lift up, over and down, making our way along the inside of the hull. Lots of holes to drop through, allowing one to swim under what would have been a lower deck. Curiously, shoals of fish seem to be congregating here, and show little concern at this bubble-breathing monster. Unfortunately, it is all too easy to forget about the existence of the other members of the team, and Iain causes John a few anxious moments, as he vanishes into the murk, only to reappear from a completely different direction. Up at the bow, more of the ship's framework is present. Conveniently, there are three diver-sized holes in the metal lattice which Neil, John and Iain head for. Inconveniently, James chooses this moment to descend through the middle gap, cutting John off from the others. Something of a melee results, with buddies trying desperately to identify each other. More worryingly, James' buddy, Ida, appears to be missing, and for a short time, Iain wonders if James has innocently been following one of us, without realising that we are the threesome. However, Ida materialises and the confusion resolves, with the threesome moving off down the port side. Iain signals John that he is going to drop over the side, to have a look for crustaceans hiding along the bottom of the hull. On return, neither John, nor Neil is to be seen.

The "30 second look-around" is spent moving aft, sweeping from gunwale to gunwale until bubbles are seen at just about the point when surfacing was mandated. John looks just about ready to punch someone, most probably Iain, but resists. Hereafter, the group sticks much more tightly together, as they move aft, then follow the anchor line some considerable distance back from the boat, until it eventually disappears beneath the seabed.

On their return to the wreck, they go looking for the propeller. The front and pivots of the rudder are still obvious, and, there being no space for a screw in front of the propeller, we conclude that she must have been a twin screw vessel. However, on neither side is there any evidence of propeller, prop-shaft, or any conduit through which the shaft might have run. It is only as they give up and return to the deck level, that Iain twigs that this might just indicate a sailing vessel! John remembers reading that she was a paddle steamer, and the team feel collectively stupid!

Iain decides that the viz has deteriorated to the extent that a line-laying exercise would a) be interesting, b) be actually quite appropriate and c) add to his OWI time (is anyone seeing a consistent theme here?). Line is laid as they move forward, taking it in turns to play with the reel, and tie off convenient metal, until Neil turns the dive. Iain reels in, but rapidly discovers that there is (another!) kit problem. The line has escaped from the normal guide, and is making every attempt to wrap itself around the spindle, rather than the reel. John and Neil disappear off ahead, without realising that they've left the DO behind. Iain decides to fix the reel, rather than continuing, gathering up line and risking entanglement. He has almost cleared the jam when John finally comes back, having noticed the slackness of the line. Progress continues at a much slower pace, with eye contact much improved.

After these events and the normal buddy arrangement of John hovering by Neil's fins, while Neil leans further and further into holes, John is heard to remark that he is going to bring a pair of leads next time, to stop Iain and Neil disappearing at regular intervals!

Towards the end of his dive, James demonstrates his potential to become an Assistant Instructor, teaching Ida how to play musical regulators. Fill a DSMB with your octopus, until the octopus free-flows. Try to stop this by putting it into your mouth, but arrange to make your primary free-flow as soon as you take it out. Swap back to sort out your primary, but allow the octopus to cook off again. By this stage, your buddy should be unable to see your head for bubbles, and will respond by sticking their octopus into the cloud, in the general direction of your mouth. When they purge it, together whichever free-flowing reg is already in your mouth at the time, your tonsils should become nicely freeze-dried. For extra marks, the conclusion of the game should involve your torch leash having wrapped itself around your primary hose, tying your hand to your face. James' computer shows that they somehow held their depth at 5m +/- 1 throughout. They would have us believe that this is a testament to their buoyancy skills...others would suggest pure bloody luck!

### **Scene 3 - The Return Journey**

With all equipment washed down and packed, the convoy departs. However, it soon becomes apparent that the motorways are full of Sunday drivers, determined to make the journey home as slow as possible. Neil elects to continue with the snail's pace up the M3, while Iain decides to do some "seat-of-the-pants" navigation via Oxford. With much clearer roads, but a much longer route, Cat, John and Iain finally get back to Cambridge about 15 minutes behind Neil's Tonka Toy. After clearing things up, Neil temporarily bounces out of CUUEG's life with the words, "When can we do this again?"

And so to bed...? Not quite. First, it was time to sort out plans for the new intake. And so, "To the pub, to the pub!"...