



**Diving the Submarine Escape Training Tank
Fort Blockhouse
18th February 2001**

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Trip Report by John Kendall

Divers:

- Iain Smith
 - John Kendall
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**Date: 18th Feb
Time: 0430 (arrggghhh)**

Get up, and drive to Bury St. Edmonds to pick up Iain. Not a big deal you would think, and neither did I. Until I got onto the A14, to discover the visibility was about 5m. Now those of you who have been in a car with me, know my driving style needs more vis than that. As such I was late getting to Bury. When I got there I discovered Iain locked behind an automatic door at the hospital. Once I had directed his attention to the sign next to him, which read "Push button to open door", he was forced to run the gauntlet of laughter from the Casualty staff who had been watching him on the CCTV monitor before we could load up and get on our way.

"Where to?" you ask.

The Submarine Escape Training Tank, *Fort Blockhouse*, Gosport, is the answer. a 30m deep 6m diameter 'pool' for training submariners in the art of escaping from a sinking submarine.

"Why?", You ask, and at 4:30 in the morning we were wondering much the same ourselves.

The reason - A bunch of Divers who read the [uk.rec.scuba](#) internet newsgroup do trips around the country throughout the year. Both Iain and I contribute to the newsgroup and about 4 months ago spotted a posting advertising an Unusual Dive, so we thought "Yeah, why not?"

Arriving in Portsmouth at about 0820 we found our way to *Fort Blockhouse* (Partially by looking for the really big tower and driving towards it), and checked in. The day started with a briefing from the Naval supervisor on duty, and then all our details were taken and we were asked to fill in the standard PADI "if we kill you it's not our fault" form. (One of these days, PADI UK will work out that this form is completely pointless, as it has no basis in UK Law.)

Luckily, there is a lift in the tower, 'cos even Iain didn't really feel like dragging kit up 10 flights of stairs. So up we go, into the changing room, and start kitting up. Problem time - Iain breaks an LP hose connector, leaving part of it jammed in his first stage. "How?" you ask. And a good question it would be. So after borrowing spares from other people in the group we cart our kit to the top of the tank. It is amazing, you can see the bottom perfectly from the top, and the water is 32°C.

When it is our turn to dive (they only let 1 buddy pair down at a time) we borrow an Underwater Frisbee from some of the others, and jokingly promise not to lose it. And we descend. If when you think of a descent, you think about a nice gentle floating downwards, then you might have been a bit surprised to see the two of us, head down, wings deflated, clearing as fast as we could, on a Stuka dive-bombing run to the bottom. (Having looked at my computer download, it looks like 0-25m in 40 seconds, which equates to 37.5m/min...and I was chasing Iain's slipstream! But in truth, only slightly faster than BSAC's 30m/min recommended Max) At 25m I started adding air into my wing, and finally stopped moving at about 27m, which is about the top of the escape pods on the bottom. At this point I was feeling very euphoric, giggly and had an almost uncontrollable urge to sing.

Yep, I was marked. It was very interesting feeling Narcosis in water that was virtually invisible, in nice warm circumstances, and with none of the traditional contributing factors. So I did the only sensible thing. I threw the frisbee at Iain. (Well, it seemed like a good idea at the time!)

A few minutes of this, and we got bored, so tried a few long hose drills. After a while, the narcosis seemed to have worn off, and we were left with nothing to do, but have a nose around the valve gear at the bottom. This is when Iain decided to throw the frisbee at my head. And I decided to move.

Bye-bye frisbee. I didn't think it would be possible to lose a frisbee in an enclosed space. Nor did anyone else there. But we did. At the bottom there are panels under which is the filtration system, guess where the disc went? Yep, got it under one.

Now, although this tank is used by bubbleheads, bootnecks and swabbies [Webmaster: submariners, Royal Marines and sailors] who

doubtless shed all sorts of unspeakable species of belly-button fluff and toe-nail jam, we weren't entirely sure whether the filtration system was up to dealing with a 35cm piece of rubber. Iain gets himself in front of the camera (did we mention that - there's a camera on the bottom so that people can be watched as they cavort) and signals, "Problem. Frisbee. Under." At least, that's what he says he was signalling...

With no way of knowing whether they had understood, we decided to call short the dive and ascend, which we did, With a 1 min at 6m (ish) safety stop. All in all quite a fun dive.

Max Depth 28m

Total time, about 24mins

Total cost:

- £30 each petrol
- £25 each for the dive.
- £1 each for air

So £55 each and a 7 hour round trip for a 24 minute dive. Yep I reckon it was worth it.

Would I do it again, um, Probably, but I'd rather take a group of CUUEG divers with me, and watch them on the video camera!

My profile can be seen [here](#)

PS At the time of writing, efforts are still in progress to locate the frisbee which was apparently fished out later in the day. According to different members of staff, it was variously handed to one of the second group from uk.rec.scuba, taken to Horsea Island Dive Centre, taken to LIDS where it was given to someone completely randomly, but currently seems to have vanished from human ken. So that will be another £30 for the trip cost...