



**Farne Isles  
5-7 May 2001**

[Trip Report Index](#)

---

## **Trip Report by Richard Van Der Hoff**

### **The Motley Crew**

- Serena Dobson
- Rowan Woodhouse
- Iain "You WILL die!" Smith
- Rich "The Navigator" van der Hoff
- Ed Pain
- John "I drove all night" Kendall
- Kat Hadfield
- Ida Lister
- Paul Atkinson
- Ed Coney
- James Donnelly

### **Co-starring:**

- Eddie the skipper
- 

### **The advance party...**

As with all well-executed military expeditions, it was vital to dispatch a scout party to ensure that conditions were suitable. With this in mind, and recognising the value of a 3/4 ton LandRover as a kit-hauler, Serena was packed off with lots of cylinders, Rowan and Iain on Thursday night to test the lie of the land. More specifically, I abandoned lots of cylinders, my weight belt and generally as many heavy things with Iain in the compressor shed as I thought it would be reasonable to make Serena drive to the Farnes. They seemed to make it, nevertheless, so this may not have been as foolish as it sounds.

The only major incident of note on the way north was seeing a lorry on fire somewhere in a warehouse carpark next to the Tyne. Dutifully, they called it in and were then faced with the unenviable task of describing the location of the fire when our only view of it had been a twenty second-glimpse while travelling at 70mph (or thereabouts!). Still, one can but try.

---

### **Day 0 - Friday**

#### **The main body...**

Having failed to organise a minibus, we were forced to execute the fall-back plan of packing stuff into the comedy that is CUUEG members' cars. Well, some of them were comedy (John rather uncharitably later called mine "an old wreck"); Ed Coney is obviously finding Kent far too profitable as it is no longer necessary to "get out for the speed bumps" when travelling with him. (See [Fort Bovisand, 1998](#) for those too young to understand.)

It was clear, from the fact that we spent only 15 minutes faffing at the kit store on Friday night, that something vital was missing. Nobody could think what it was, merely putting our efficiency down to Iain's absence, so we gaily set forth and reconvened 5 hours later in Beadnell.

Iain, in his wisdom, had gone to sleep in and locked the door to the room with the tenth bed. With a 50/50 chance of finding the right room, Sod's law prevailed and we found a rather disgruntled and bleary-eyed Serena before finding Paul a bed.

As I lay in bed, congratulating myself on my organisational skills and contemplating the next day's diving, it occurred to me what I had forgotten. I hadn't seen my drysuit since Cambridge.

---

## Day 1 - Saturday

One of the best things about Stan Hall's is the hearty breakfast which is included in the package. This was true again this year and it also gave me time to contemplate my drysuit situation; I was advised by all that I was a rather foolish fellow and made arrangements with my courier (aka John K) and local wet-suit hire (Ed P).

Vicious rumours were spread about the time of departure with the sole intention of annoying Iain and making the entire group late, and due to that and some excellent navigation on my part ("errrr... I think we're in the wrong village"), by the time we made it to Seahouses pier and found Eddie the skipper I think he was about to pack up and go home.

Once again the curse of the Farnes was felt in the O-ring department with one of the cylinders missing an O-ring altogether. Fortunately we were able to restrain ourselves to only a couple of replacements, rather than the Viton-sponsored affair that was our last visit.

The first dive was on the "Blue Caps", a pleasant enough wall dive in about 20m. The dive set the scene for much of the weekend's diving, with about 5m vis, and plenty of sea-urchins, starfish and dead-man's-fingers. Seals were disappointingly a little thin on the ground (or in the water); Kat and Serena managed to spot one; and Ida, who was my buddy for the day, claimed to have seen one and signalled frantically (I still suspect her of making it up), but that was about it.

The water was a shade on the chilly side at about 7 degrees, but the sun was shining and everybody was relaxed and happy. So much so, in fact, that Eddie seemed to be unable to believe that it could take so few divers so long to get into the water. CUUEG was on form; not helped, of course, by Ed and I having to share a suit.

After the great faff of the morning, the surface interval was a little brief before we descended on the "Pinnacles". Here there was the prospect of some wreckage; unfortunately the only bit of metal found on the dive was by Serena, who was most excited by her discovery of a heat exchanger. There were a few little jellyfish around, but their appeal soon waned and I decided I would hack open a sea urchin (why else would I carry a dive knife?) This had me branded a murderer; however it did have the desired effect of attracting fish, in this case a lone wrasse. Ed Coney, meanwhile, had been attending the Iain Smith school of buddy-diving and pulled an out-of-air drill on James, proving conclusively that snorkels have no place in scuba-diving at any time, never mind when diving with a long hose.

I'm pleased to be able to report that we were a little more adventurous in terms of the evening's activity than the last trip to the Farnes. Some filled tanks; those not foolish enough to be in the wrong place at the wrong time (mainly by dint of stopping for ice-cream on the way home) went for a walk along the beach; still others laughed at Iain when he found his Weezy boots in his room after being convinced someone had thrown them overboard. Dinner at the Craster Arms was very welcome to complete the evening.

---

## Day 2 - Sunday

John having finally made his appearance at 6 am, in order to circumvent the previous day's tardiness, I added the CUUEG Faff Factor™ to our departure time; unfortunately so had Eddie which meant we had to wait around on the pier for him. This was not as much of a problem as the fact that the tide had also heard CUUEG's reputation for timekeeping and the boat was still high and dry. This left us with little choice but to sit around until the boat floated.

Iain and James spent this time taking James' regs apart. Apparently the problem was that the leaking second stage needed a wash; Iain felt it best to deal with this situation by throwing it, now separated from the rest of the regs, into the rapidly-filling harbour... fortunately Ed Coney was foolish enough to be standing around in his semidry and was sent in to find it.

The first dive today was on the "Britannia". Can't remember what the boat was supposed to be, and anyway it's a bit academic as it was more a dive in the vicinity of a wreck than a wreck dive. Apparently some pairs found some exciting metal bits; instead I entertained Rowan and Paul with the occasional buoyancy flail in my newly-arrived drysuit. We also met Iain who did his best to tie up his SMB line with ours.

Lunch was rather more relaxed than the previous day, affording some sunbathing time before kitting up again for the second dive. This dive is logged as "Smelly Cliff"; nobody could remember its real name and the amount of guano on the rocks made Kat's name for it rather better anyway. It was a wall dive in about 16m; quite a few hermit crabs were seen scuttling around, including James' comedy sighting of a hermit crab who hadn't been keeping up the mortgage payments.

We had the grand plan of a barbecue for dinner, so Paul and I spent a couple of hours driving around Northumberland looking for somewhere which sold burgers at 5pm on Sunday, while others filled tanks. I wish I could claim the barbecue to be a great success; unfortunately it would have been more appropriate on 5th November. Nevertheless, we extracted some edible food and fun was had by all. Serena and Rowan set off for home, while the rest of us decamped to the pub for dessert.

---

## Day 3 (Monday)

Bit of a rude shock in the form of an early start to catch the tide at one of the further dive sites ("The Knivestone"). This site had a fairly gentle slope out to sea, though there was some wreckage (read "bits of metal") in the shallower waters of the inlets and most of the pairs stayed above 20m. Quite a few spider crabs were spotted, as were some sun-stars and other bits and bobs. No seals though...

During the surface interval (more like elevenses than lunchtime!), Eddie seemed to drive halfway around the North Sea trying to find us some

seals; to be fair, he succeeded and we saw about twenty of them scattered about. We even saw some swimming, which impressed Iain so much he felt the need to jump in. After initial derision, he soon had almost all those with drysuits joining him, which of course scared off the seals. Oh well.

The second dive was at "Cloverleaf Rock"; this was essentially a wall dive in about 20m. Kat spotted an octopus; her buddy (yours truly) looked bored by the white frondy thing she was pointing at excitedly. Oops. There were also some wrasse and nudibranchs around which helped make a very pleasant dive to finish the weekend.

That left little to do but to shoehorn kit and people into cars and make our way back to Cambridge. The seals being on their holidays made for a bit of a disappointment, but I think everybody had a fun weekend, so thanks are due to all for helping make it so!