



**Sound of Mull  
Scotland  
7-14 July 2001**

[Trip Report Index](#)

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**Trip report by Iain Smith  
Additional material by Dave Martin and James Donnelly**

**The Divers:**

- Dave "Plan the Dive?" Martin
- John "Dive the Wreck" Kendall
- Iain "Wreck the Plan" Smith
- Tom "Timekeeper" Riley
- James "Deco Lecturer" Donnelly
- Mark "Spielberg" Holmes
- Paul "Slippery Hands" Atkinson
- Ida Lister
- Nicola "Fishfeeder" Armitage
- Vladimir Jokovitch
- Laurent "Viellneuve" Seugnet

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Those who couldn't really care less about CUUEG "on tour" and just want to read about the dives should know that the diving for the first two days was from a Wilson Flyer, skippered by [Lochaline Boat Charters'](#) David Ferguson and thereafter from the MV *Brendan*, skippered by Alan, also of Lochaline Boat Charters. Accommodation was at [Ardtornish Estate](#) in Craighendarroch 2 and Claggan Cottages and gas was bought from [Lochaline Dive Centre](#). We couldn't speak more highly of any of them. For the diving, please click on the following links:

- [John Preston](#)
- [Thesis](#)
  
- [Shuna](#)
- [Clam Dive](#)
  
- [Tapti](#)
- [Pelican](#)
  
- [Rondo](#)
- [Hispania](#)
  
- [Ardtornish Bay](#)
  
- [Hispania](#)
- [Breda](#)
  
- [Thesis](#)

For those who want the full story, read on:

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At first there were twelve going. Then there were eleven. Then possibly one more. Then ten. And at the last minute, eleven once more. Very confusing.

Needless to say, that made organisation of the transport plan "interesting" at the least, not to say last-minute. Ultimately, final arrangements were made on the day we left, on a journey involving five different vehicles, four different routes and two pickups on the way.

After travelling several hundred miles, the plan called for us to spend what was left of the first night trying to sleep in cars at the Corran-Ardgour ferry pier. John and Tom were thus somewhat surprised, and not a little alarmed to find no-one there when they arrived at 0330. Those of us coming in convoy from Cambridge had stopped off at a bunkhouse two minutes round the corner and, having sampled the local brew, retired for a night of relative comfort. Somehow, we had forgotten to tell John and Tom - oops!

Nonetheless, everyone was in remarkably good spirits, and when Nicola and Mark turned up a true miracle was seen to have taken place. All

members of a CUUEG trip in the right place at the right time! Definitely a good omen! However, John's state of mind was definitely open to question, as illustrated by the following conversation:

John: "What day is it?"

Iain: "It's going to be one of those trips, isn't it?"

John: "No, seriously, what day is it?"

Our objectives for the trip were firstly to qualify Vladimir and Laurent as Sports Divers and then, over the course of the week, to gradually build up the level of diving that everyone was comfortable doing. One particular complication for marshalling was that three members of the group were diving on tables and this had predictable implications for dive planning and decompression requirements. Further, in fairness to those not on tables but who were buddying with those who were, it was necessary to swap buddy pairs around while still maintaining an adequate level of leadership for the less experienced.

Because of the intensity and depth of diving, a precautionary 3 minute safety stop at 6m was mandated for all dives in excess of 30m (and recommended for all others).

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## 07 July 2001

### **John Preston - "The Slate Wreck"**

Our first dive of the trip, *John Preston* provided an opportunity to shake ourselves down for sea diving. There is little of the "wreck" remaining other than some of the main structural timbers at around 17m. The remains are best visualised as a wreck looking up the slope at it. Being more familiar with Scottish wrecks than most of the group, David was surprised to hear this wreck described as such. The cargo of slates, however, is certainly in evidence. Both slates and wood are marked with marine archaeology tags, aiding location.

The wall for the later part of the dive looked ominously black beyond, certainly promising some reasonable wall dive. However the skippers depth estimation proved a little out, with the vertical bits not really starting until about 22-24m, proving tantalising for those working to a 24m table plan.

This dive was the DO's first chance to embarrass himself and he took full opportunity of it by completely missing the wreck, having to strip and reassemble his SMB reel at depth and consequently having his CD student buddy run well into his air reserve. (Then again, that's the whole reason we have a reserve...) Nonetheless, this misdemeanor was deemed sufficiently serious for him to nominate himself as the first diver on washing up duty!

During the surface interval a "discussion" as to the necessity of gas planning for decompression dives. Ultimately the DO's slight but understandable paranoia won out and those on tables were forced to plan the dive properly. To add 'accuracy' a surface consumption figure was worked out using the fall over five minutes, thus proving that an air integrated computer may actually have at least one real use. Nicola was first up, with a figure that made Iain jealous. [*Webmaster's note: We assume the author is talking about her rate of gas consumption!*] For interest, he decided to measure his consumption to see how he compared with Nicola...whom he beat by some margin. The dives over the rest of the week suggested his result was not hugely inaccurate, unlike Vladimir who was able to prove how much of a waste of time the process was, with a normal surface consumption, but underwater, a huge guzzling rate, due mainly due to a single-piece wetsuit with many holes.

### **Thesis**

This very beautiful wreck lies on a slope and a good dive can be had at any planned maximum depth between 24m and 33m. The bows lie in more shallow water with the ribs providing interesting swimthroughs. Deeper, a fairly tight swim through leads into the hold, although it is easier to find this if coming forward from the hold. A conger eel lives in a hole on the aft wall of the forward access to the tunnel. Huge amounts of life live on and around this wreck.

I think it fair to say that John, David and Iain were feeling a little frustrated about being limited by the BSAC 88 tables on this dive as they could tell from the bows that there was much to explore which was currently out of reach. David discovered another minor irritation (for computer-divers) of diving with buddies on tables...a mere ten centimetres violation of the maximum depth resulted in an extra four minutes of stops...

In the evening, it was yet again shown that certain CUUEG divers have their own special way of doing things. Some divers plan dives on tables, some make it up as they go along on dive computers, some tekkies take palmtops running decompression planning software out on the boat with them. John, however, produced his desktop PC! The sight of most of the group winding Iain and John up over the hours of planning the dive, planning "what if" scenarios, juggling gas consumption and decompression penalties was to be a prominent feature of the evenings' entertainment during the week. However, mention has to be made of "Buffy the Vampire Slayer", of which John had brought two series on DVD. Worse, over the course of the week, at least one other member of the group succumbed to her supernatural charms - an addiction his girlfriend is still trying to wean him off!

But perhaps the most surprising sight was Ida *volunteering* to do the washing up in Iain's place...is our company really that boring?

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**08 July 2001**

## ***Shuna***

We staggered our entry onto this wreck, with the consequence that as the last pairs went in, they descended past the first pairs at their decompression and safety stops. The wreck is structurally intact, with a seabed in excess of 35m. The largest wreck that most of us had seen, it takes around 10 minutes to fin the length of the wreck, and the seabed is not visible from deck level. Indeed, one gunwale is not visible from the other and from 28m, it is just possible to make out two of the huge propellor blades...if one happens to have a suitably powerful torch (like a canister light). Of course, those diving in a less regimented manner were able to get up close and see much more of it...even with a torch which had blown out a bulb early in the dive. (With two floodings during the course of the week, the ability to switch in a second bulb underwater is about the only redeeming feature of David's UK D8R torch) The boiler room is very interesting, with boilers, pipes and catwalks all easily visible without penetrating. Laying line would be essential if divers wished to penetrate as there is the possibility of losing sight of the entrance in areas with no clear route to the surface.

The ascent from the wreck provided an object lesson in why currents can be annoying. Launching DSMBs from a sheltered wreck into a building current requires a bit of thought...

Additionally, the conclusion to one dive provided a perfect example of why diving on the buoyancy of the drysuit alone can be questionable - during safety stops, Laurent had extreme difficulty keeping his feet down due to air in his feet. The final ascent involved Iain hanging off him, dumping everything he could to control the rate of ascent. Miraculously, no ascent warnings were recorded by computers or dive timers, thus saving Iain from a second day of washing up duties...

## **Clam dive**

The afternoon dive was a gentle drift dive over a fairly uninteresting plateau at around 20m. Uninteresting, that is, except to the unabashed carnivores who were grabbing scallops (known as clams in Scotland) as quickly as they could find them. This was perhaps a less enjoyable dive for the two vegetarians on the trip! Over the course of a 50 minute dive, the current built up to possibly a knot. This dive was the first test of the material of Iain's new drygloves. One edible crab decided that it did not wish to live up to its name, and attached itself to the glove, including a bit of thumb for good measure. Fortunately, despite its best efforts, the material held and the crab was "encouraged" to enter the catch-bag.

One curiosity on this dive was a regular noise which sounded like a digital datastream. Initially, both Iain and John were concerned that this might be a symptom of oxygen toxicity (despite being nowhere near the Maximum Operating Depth of their mixes) but were reassured to find that the air divers were hearing it as well.

John caused a slight worry on the boat at the end of this dive when he launched a yellow DSMB up the same line as his red. As this had previously been discussed as an emergency signal for dives later in the week, he perhaps would have done well to brief the rest of the boat that he was going to have a practise on this easy dive... Fortunately he surfaced before anyone got back in the water to "rescue" him.

Dinner was very nice...except for those who for those who have forsworn meat, who were back on their basic pasta rations. Thanks to Mark for his excellent culinary skills.

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**09 July 2001**

## ***Tapti***

The wind was up, but the skipper reckoned that a wreck some distance out of the Sound (near Coll) was manageable. By and large, he was right. Unfortunately we hadn't counted on Nicola's total intolerance of anything more than a Force 1, and she spent the entire journey out looking progressively greener and, on occasion, was generous enough to donate installments of her breakfast to the fish. She managed to communicate well enough to indicate that there was no way she was going diving. David dealt with his own queasiness by spending as much time as possible meditating before winning the trip record for shortest time to kit up and get over the side.

*Tapti* is a huge wreck. Although generally broken there are still some recognisable features. However, the real attraction is the size, number and variety of life. Everything seems to have been scaled up. Either that, or there is so much that is big, that the little things get away without being seen. From crabs which looked like they would take someone's finger off without trying to two-foot long fish to nudibranchs which were over two inches long (!) this wreck was undoubtedly one of the highlights of the trip. Hiding in a crack at one end (the distinction between "pointy-end" and "flat end" was lost amidst the wreckage) was a rather cosy looking ling.

The curse of Iain's kit showed its first teeth on this dive. Somehow one of his prized dry-gloves picked up a tiny hole in it at the beginning of the dive. To avoid seepage up along his wristlets (worn to allow pressure equalisation), he pulled the glove off to remove the wristlet. In so doing, he ended up with far more water going up his arm that he would had he left it alone!

Our surface interval was spent returning to Tobermory. Such was Nicola's relief at getting to dry land that she leaped ashore and headed for the shops...before discovering that her feet had adjusted to the movement of the boat, which now wasn't there. Having performed an artistic flop over a shop doorway, her arms and legs were left looking like someone had been using her as a punchbag.

## ***Pelican***

The second dive was on a wreck just next to Tobermory. This was one dive which we should all have been well prepared for. The only thing comparable is going straight across the bottom of Gildy on a compass bearing! We had been briefed to expect a wreck at 15m, lying just off a wall, maybe getting as deep as 18m. Those of us with plans for deeper dives (or who were on computers) were thus somewhat surprised to meet the wreck starting at 19m. David and Vladimir were fortunately equipped with a submersible copy of the tables and were thus able to replan their dive to an extent, although they elected to do a not-particularly interesting wall dive, while Tom and Laurent, expecting to meet the wreck well within their plan, hit the wreck below their maximum planned depth and realised that they had no option but to abort to 6m and wait for a while before surfacing.

Apparently the first pairs down were able to see the wreck from just out from the wall as they descended while later pairs were met by a huge billowing cloud of silt - a clear indication that CUUEG needs to stop teaching flutter kicking and teach everyone how to frog-kick from day one! It also appeared that the new SDs required, perhaps, a little more practise at stopping a descent without hitting the bottom.

The dive got a bit clearer at the bottom of the hull, viz getting as high as a mediocre day in Gildenburgh! Nonetheless, it was undoubtedly far more interesting than the Sludge with shoals of fish, a couple of crabs and the usual plethora of squat lobsters.

As far as anyone could tell, *Pelican* lies angled to port with some holds. However, such was the silting that it is hard to be sure of anything!

Paul decided to try a new technique for launching a DSMB. He found that letting go of the reel is a guaranteed way to ensure that the buoy reaches the surface. However, one finds it hard to think how this imaginative technique assists in diver location...

After three days of getting some sleep, John had now worked out what day it was, and felt awake enough to attempt to attach his new leg pouch. While he desperately wanted to avoid a repetition of Iain's antics in [Weymouth](#) he was confronted by the small problem that the pocket consisted of sides and a front, but no back. The engineers (and biological-or-medical-scientists-who-should-really-have-been-engineers) set to work in best Blue Peter fashion with only common household materials available to them (namely lots of blocks of wood, an axe with a broken shaft, and a washing-up bowl) and created something they hoped would hold the pocket tight to allow the glue to set. A conveniently pocket-shaped useful block of wood was placed inside the pocket to give it form. How to get it out was something they decided to worry about later.

No-one having done anything particularly daft during the diving, Iain felt honour bound to volunteer for the washing up, thus gaining the Branch record for "Most Consecutive Days On Washing-Up Duty". Nonetheless, scurrilous gossip suggests that he didn't actually seem to do it more often than anyone else...

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## 10 July 2001

### ***Rondo***

*Rondo* is a well known wreck, with her bows in 50+ metres, and her stern at less than 6m. It is clearly common to perform decompression dives on her, as evidenced by the piece of wreck at 6m, where there is a convenient handle-shaped projection, worn smooth by the touch of divers' hands. However, the wreck becomes very narrow as it reaches the surface, and decompression stops can become very congested. Deploying DSMBs and moving clear of the wreck might be a better idea...as long as the divers remember to look up first to avoid harpooning anyone above them!

Due to the tide on this wreck, the skipper was keen for us to arrive on site ready to drop in. Generally we managed it, the main exceptions being those who were on tables who were desperately trying to make their watches go faster to get them back on to a tissue code of "A" to get the maximum from this wreck which, it has to be conceded, is best suited to triangular profiles on computers, or intensively pre-planned multi-level profiles.

Visibility was fantastic and this led to the only potentially serious incident of the trip. After a couple of minutes at around 6m waiting for John to clear his ears, Iain and he began a fairly rapid descent. Iain was not monitoring his depth as closely as he should have been and, misled by the clarity of the water, thought he was at around 25m when he looked around for John. For some reason John was hovering some 3m above him, flashing his torch back and forth, signalling, "UP! UP!" Iain responded by finning up towards him, with long hose deployed. However, it was soon apparent that this was not any sort of out-of-air situation. John had stopped at around 32m, right on the Maximum Operating Depth of the nitrox mix in use (33.5%) while Iain had blown through it, hitting 34.5m at the point where (fortunately) he had turned to look for John. John later commented that it was just as well for Iain's continuing health that they had had 15min of stops to complete, which gave him time to calm down somewhat.

One other point that this highlighted is that as good as a Vega lamp is for a lantern, it is totally invisible against the beam cast by a halogen canister light on a site where the ambient light is relatively good.

For those who had a dive which went according to the plan, *Rondo* provided one of the most memorable sights of the trip - looking up from 30m with the wreck backlit and towering up to the surface. As James put it, "A testament to the power of the sea".

### ***Hispania***

During our surface interval, it became clear that because of the timings enforced on us by the tides, those on tables were going to have to be put in the water with tissue codes and profiles which could easily have resulted in them having huge decompression penalties if their dives were only slightly off the plan. Further, there was a strong possibility that some could run very low on air if this happened. In keeping with the DO's directive for decompression dive planning, Tom and David spent some considerable time scribbling away at bailout plans. However, it

was only once that they had completed these that they warned him that there might be a potential problem with air requirements in an emergency. John and Iain therefore scurried frantically around the deck in best "Heath Robinson" style, attempting to find some way of padding out a 12L cylinder so that the doubled jubilee clips could grip it. Fortunately, John's pocket hadn't fallen off and with a bit of coaxing, the "useful bit of wood" was persuaded to come out. It added enough bulk that we were able to rig a 12L cylinder as an emergency bottle with four second stages on it! Once kitted up, the adjustments to the final prototype were dictated as the "twin boys" found themselves with limited movement due to the stupid amount of kit carried. After three changes of buoy, one of the *Brendan's* fenders was eventually attached to a reel to provide buoyancy for the tank.

Miraculously, despite the strict time limit, both Iain and John were able to roll over the side as we reached the site. The 12L was lowered to Iain, who carried it as a stage bottle. John got to carry both 3L decompression bottles and an unusual SMB!

Pausing at 6m to rig the bottle on the shotline, Iain and John continued down to the deck where John passed off one of the 3L bottles. Divers who followed them down later commented that they were amazed by the accuracy of positioning the bottle as they descended - 6m on the dot.

This dive was one familiar to Tom and Iain - *Hispania* being the wreck which the pair of them had laid line all over during the BSAC West of Scotland Expedition in 1998. It was strange to notice how much we had missed, due to our concentration on the line. It also became clear to Iain that while there are some spaces which one can get through with a single on, different rules apply with a twinset, canister light and exploration reel!

Moving along the bottom of the wreck, Iain was astonished to see someone with a light which appeared to be as bright as his! Mark and his video camera were on the prow! Coming up over the bows, Iain performed the obligatory "Titanic" moment...and was perplexed to see John signalling "unicorn fish" (!) Forward of the superstructure, there is a huge hold, which really ought to be lined by any divers penetrating it. It is full of silt, though high enough that staying up off the bottom is not a problem and home to some very large squat lobsters.

Meantime, those leading divers on tables were enforcing dive discipline to a degree previously unheard of. Clearly they didn't want to have to hang around for 20 minutes at 6m! However, at least one of the leaders was heard to complain that the only thing he remembers is the area immediately around the shotline, so desperate was he to memorise it for the return!

As there was potential for all the single tank divers to be clear of the water by the time that Iain and John returned to collect the cylinder, the other pairs were asked to collect a boltsnap from the tank as they went past to indicate that they were clear. Obviously the last thing we wanted to happen was to have divers coming up late to find that the emergency gas supply had gone walkies...

As if there wasn't enough pressure on David already, Laurent managed to disconnect a drysuit feed some fifteen minutes into the dive and drift off down and away from the wreck... Some quick action on David's part not only prevented a horrific stops obligation but also stopped Laurent taking a flying leap of the end of the tables and incurring a 24-hour dive ban. To make their lives even more interesting, they encountered a solo diver (from another group!) decompressing at 12m with a whole 25 bar left. Rather strangely, offers of assistance were declined and the diver headed straight up to the surface.

On the way up, the first pair of divers reached 6m and held the line. Unfortunately, as the current was starting to run the sideways force started to pull the line down. The first pair slipped up the line to maintain 6m. The next pair remembered that it was better to pull the stop slightly below the ceiling and so hung on below the first pair. By the time Iain and John arrived back, there were eight divers clustered above the bottle which had now been pulled below 8m! The first divers to complete their stops report ascending past the buoys...which had been dragged underwater by the number of divers on the line and crushed by the pressure! Fortunately no-one else was trying to put divers on the wreck!

By the time we got ashore, the rain was lashing down - so much so that we figured that the cars would get no wetter if we stayed in our drysuits for the trip home. Paul, Laurent and David went to sort out fills, only to realise that in the post-dive confusion, no-one had found out what Iain and John wanted in their twinsets. With no sign of either of them, Paul decided to phone them...except that his normal phone was in for repair and he didn't have their numbers on the replacement. In a fit of enthusiasm, David leapt into the back of the van...almost. Headbutting the top of the back door proved very effective as a means of arresting his progress mid-jump and dropped him on his back in a puddle. >...Being kitted up in a drysuit, the whole thing seemed curiously funny to him, whilst slightly less amusing to Paul who, as a 4th year medic, was desperately wishing he'd done the bit on management of acute head injuries. David chose to lie in the rain for a while, before uttering some garbage, and being told to hold on tightly during the ride home. After a few hours in bed, David was mostly recovered, with the exception of not quite knowing where he was and walking into a few things. It is worth adding that just a few hours later David was to volunteer to give Dive Leader lectures to all the DL trainees on the trip....hmmm

...and yes, that evening, Iain was doing the washing up again! Rumour has it that he's now after a Skill Development Course badge for it...

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## 11 July 2001

### *Ardtornish*

On this, the fifth day of the expedition, the weather turned against us. All of the good wrecks were blown out, and the skipper advised us to go for a couple of scenic sheltered dives. The first of these was in Ardtornish Bay which is very picturesque both above and below the water. Allegedly a wall to somewhere between 35m and 90m, the site turned out to be a moderate slope. This was still more than able to provide a decent scenic dive. Squat lobsters were hiding under every rock larger than a couple of inches, with forests of brittlestars and many unusually coloured starfish making an appearance. The Bay is nicely sheltered, although a strong current was running across the mouth. The second

dive was another clam hunt, this time including a couple of large crabs and some huge missiles. Iain decided to adjust his weighting for a single tank, got it rather badly wrong, and ended up bobbing around on the surface feeling exceedingly foolish while the boat came about to deliver his weightbelt.

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## 12 July 2001

### *Hispania*

We returned to the *Hispania* for the first dive, with much more relaxed plans transforming it from a famous wreck that some of the divers had been in the water near to a wreck that they enjoyed diving. This time, it was Tom who had the pulses racing. Waiting for the last pair to surface, he announced, "We've got a pair five minutes overdue!" With memories of the RNLI "Deep Trouble" video in mind ("Umm, Skipper, we've got divers overdue". "How long overdue?" "Umm...about ten minutes?") we alerted the skipper and started scanning the water in all directions. About two minutes later, with no sign of them, there was the beginnings of a move to call the Coastguard when Tom spotted that his maths was out by ten minutes! Sighs of relief all round and an obvious candidate for the washing up...especially as this was supposed to be an Advanced Diver marshalling assessment!

### *Breda*

Easily the biggest wreck of the week, *Breda* was also the favourite dive for some. While most of the superstructure has collapsed, restricting access to some of the holds, there is lots to see, both in terms of life (including a conger eel) and cargo - beer bottles, cement, tyres and apparently some aircraft and vehicles. Due to the size of the wreck, it is easy to become very disoriented, especially as the stern shothline arrived at nowhere easily identifiable. There were a number of holes which appeared interesting, but John and Iain found that they would tie off, enter the hole...and promptly arrive at a bulkhead which had been lurking just beyond the limit of the torch. However, divers have died on this wreck before by getting trapped in holes, so it is likely that there are some significant penetrations possible which were not found on this trip. There are some beautiful big swim-throughs between holds.

The true appreciation of the wreck's size comes if one descends to the seabed at the bow and then moves up as one fins along the side of the wreck. That in itself is effectively a wall dive!

With the surface interval clocking up, it was decided that the various divers on tables would be better served by waiting an extra half hour and getting a dive on table B. The freshening wind persuaded Nicola that a dive on a table C was better than no dive at all so she and her buddy went in early. With the potential for a similar decompression situation to arise, the *Breda* was harder to plan safety for due to the two shothlines and the immense length of the vessel. At around the correct time for the divers to start decompressing, a DSMB unexpectedly arrived on the surface. Tom therefore deployed two safety divers who arrived at 6m at the same time as the decompressing divers. A false alarm, but good practise for two of those anticipating doing safety cover for Iain and John's final dive of the week.

The evening was spent sorting our lives out, with some packing, others cooking, and Iain desperately wishing he'd remembered to pack his girlfriend. As an accountant, sorting out the trip finances would have been far more up her street. Nonetheless, the numbers did work out (eventually) and provided something of a shock for Iain and John who now had to face up to the financial reality of diving twinsets of 32% all week with decompression cylinders of 50%. Their gas bills were over seventy pounds each, compared to everyone else's twenty-five to thirty pounds. Time to go and do a blender's course, I think!

Laurent, meanwhile, was creating something that can only be described as a work of art. The guest book in the cottages had pages of proper art-paper and Laurent was, I think, the first person in the book to make use of this. The results are shown at the top of this report.

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## 13 July 2001

Today was the big one. A couple of months of discussion, planning and training, a huge number of "what ifs" and about four hours spent the night before running various profiles had set John and Iain up for a 45m dive on the *Rondo*. From an initial cast of nine potential support divers, we were down to four, three having gone home early and two suffering from ear problems. These had been fully briefed about what was expected of them in the event of a problem. While it was not anticipated that the divers would be needed (short of at least two major equipment failures, all problems were planned and catered for) at least one pair were genuinely expecting to have to go in, to hold divers hands if nothing else. (John and Iain were a little disappointed by the evident lack of faith, but touched by the obvious concern for our wellbeing shown by the group as a whole. They remain grateful to those who agreed to sit in full kit for the duration of the planned dive - some 70 minutes) Many people asked why they wanted to do it. The answer was variously a quote of Sir Edmund Hillary about Everest - "Because it is there" or "Like every other dive we do - we want to see what is there."

As previously, we were on a tight time schedule due to the tides, and it was increasing frustration that the pair of them paced up and down the dock waiting for the occupants of the second house to appear. Eventually, in frustration, they drove off, muttering things like, "They've done it deliberately" or "The stupid blankety-blanks forgot to set an alarm". The truth was somewhat different: Laurent, attempting to evade a particularly fast moving and aggressive pot-hole, had put the van in the ditch. With one out of four wheels touching the ground and the back of the van sitting on the differential we had a bit of a problem. As we were about to try to drag it out with John's Clio, a tractor hove to: "That's not very clever, is it boys?"

Iain's reply fortunately remained unspoken as to utter it would definitely have been contrary to the maintenance of CUUEG's good name! Paul, meantime, was praying to any and every deity who might have been listening in - it was, after all, his name on the insurance documents!

However, the tractor's driver was very helpful indeed and had the van back onto the road in no time at all. Even more impressively, it seems that no damage had been done...at least, none that the rental firm noticed when it was delivered to them! Paul's closing comment on the affair is about the only one of his which is printable - "Laurent, we do drive on the left...but not *that* far!"

However, we were now over an hour late for the tide and with that one slip of the wheel, all our planning went to waste. To say that John and Iain were less than philosophical about it would be an understatement. However, in the interests of group harmony, they gave vent to their feelings only within earshot of each other. It is fair to say, however, that Laurent's survival was probably only due to Iain having not yet learned how to use looks to kill!

## **Thesis**

Our options were to return to *Hispania* or to go back to *Shuna* or *Thesis*. As neither John nor Iain remembered a great deal about *Thesis* due to having had their instructor hats on when first there, they were very much in favour of going to see what else was there. As there were no strong objections, this is what we did. However, being on air for the first time that week and having cut their tables for *Rondo* they had no suitable profiles planned. Their plan was therefore to dive on wrist computers, coming up with 10 minutes of stops showing, adding in 1 minute at 12m and 5 at 9m as bubble-catching "deep stops". This was another favourite dive from the week, with a beautiful wreck with swimthroughs and the usual plethora of life. A conger eel was spotted hiding in a hole just forward of a swim-through that leads out of the aft hold.

As David completed his dive, he asked Tom whether he should stay kitted up just in case Iain and John were anticipating safety cover for their long dive. Deciding that 12L twinsets and 3L of decompression gas would be more than sufficient for this 35m dive, they packed their bags, drank coffee, and filled out the skipper's book, detailing favourite sites of the week.

About five minutes before their anticipated surfacing time, Iain and John's DSMBs broke the surface and at the expected surfacing time, with no sign of them, the jokes began to fly. At T+5, Tom and David decided to alert the skipper and put divers back in the water as a precaution. With four people helping, it took only a rather impressive 7 minutes for kit to be dug out of dive bags and assembled, divers to get back into drysuits, kitted up and over the side, despite having to try to find cylinders with reasonable amounts of air and not being able to find DIN/yoke converters. From the surface, they could see Iain and John decompressing, in no apparent distress. Nonetheless, it was felt best to come down to find out what was happening.

What had happened was this: in accordance with the plan, John and Iain left the wreck at around 40 minutes, with 10 minutes of stops showing. However, having completed the planned 12m and 9m stops, they were up to 17 minutes of stops, putting them overdue by at least 2 minutes, having not realised the extent to which those deep stops would add to the decompression obligation. Not wishing to be a cause for concern, each deployed a DSMB, which had been the previously agreed signal for, "We are now decompressing, all is OK." (The signal for a problem would have been to deploy a yellow DSMB up the same line.) They felt confident that this would allow them to complete stops without anyone getting upset. However, a nasty surprise was that both Suunto and Aladin computers expect divers to get up to 3m to do their stops whereas Iain and John preferred to do their stops at 6m. Consequently the computers took over twice as long to clear as had been expected, with the result that Iain's computer had only just cleared and John's was showing two minutes to go just as Dave and Paul dropped down to find out what on earth was going on. Having ascertained that both divers had enough air for a further few hours at 6m, and intended to be on the surface within 5 minutes, Paul and David returned to the surface to report "All well".

In truth, both Iain and John had performed their 9m and the first 20min of the 6m stop on 50% and were seriously considering blowing off the last ten minutes of required air stops. However, the prospect of arriving back on the boat ten minutes overdue with computers showing "SOS" and "Err" was not hugely appealing! (Subsequent analysis showed that, with the stops on 50%, they could have been clear of the water only 3 minutes over time).

After pulse-rates had come down all round, it was realised that there are a number of things that need to be sorted out in order for the Branch to conduct properly set up decompression-stop diving. Any suggestions would be more than welcome.

That evening, as Iain was dissecting crabs with a pair of pliers (before finding himself in front of the sink once more!), James suddenly remembered (now that the diving was all over) that squat lobsters are also known as "langoustine" - and are a veritable delicacy!

The last evening in Lochaline was spent in the social club, as guests of the skipper. By this time, Cat had arrived, and David and James were treated to what David later described as "them acting over whisky like a pair of toddlers would with a pack of jelly babies."

Despite several significant "learning experiences" everyone on the trip felt that their individual diving had improved immeasurably. It was also hopefully educational for all. I think also that those of us who were involved in the final dive on *Thesis* have seen first hand why "on the cuff" decompression-stop diving is a very bad idea for stops of more than a token amount.