



**Plymouth
Mount Batten Watersports Centre
August 29th - September 1st 2002**

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**Organised by Ian Gregory
Trip Report by Ian Gregory and Hannah Lim**

The Lucky Few:

- Ian Gregory
 - Emma Faid
 - Tom Riley
 - James Donnelly
 - Harriet Holden
 - Liz Elliott
 - Matt Worsley
 - Geoff Elliott
 - Robin Basu-Roy
 - Tina Collier
 - Hannah Lim
 - Oh, and Pete Fergus the skipper (*Venture*).
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Day 1: Thursday 29th

As always, the beginning of the trip was marked by the collection of the transit van. Apparently, upon arrival at the hire company, the allocated van had failed its MOT a week previously, and Ian was informed that he would have to drive a brand new Ford Transit with 30 miles on the clock! After careful briefing about not overloading it, and going steady for the first 100 miles or so, it eventually transpired that the company policy was not to hire new vans out to people under 25 years old. So, after a bit more rummaging of paperwork, an alternative was found. It was the most clapped out rust-bucket they had, with a dent in every place it was possible to dent, and a radio that didn't work. Oh well, it should only take 5 hours or so to get there... right? How wrong they were.

After much cross-country driving through Baldock and Slough (expertly navigated by Harriet), they crawled to a halt on the M4. And that was that - a collision had closed the motorway, which the police had sealed off - with them stuck on it - for 3 hours! After eventually getting off, and crossing onto the M3, they were overjoyed to be yet again stuck behind a coach crash - cue another hour of waiting.

Having been picked up by Tom from the station Liz, Tom and Hannah arrived at the Mount Batten Centre around 9.45pm, they had missed last orders for food but Geoff had kindly ordered them some chips :-). They went to sort out rooms only to find the centre had no record of the party booking and had only one bed booked for Ian Gregory! A confused telephone call to a rather stressed Ian resulted in a response to the effect of "What do you expect me to do about it, I'm stuck on the motorway having done 2 and a half miles in the last 3 hours - sort something out".

At the time, Ian and Harriet were just passing Exeter and arrived at 11pm after a mammoth 9 hour drive due to serious traffic jams on the M4 and M3. When they arrived Ian came to the rescue by producing a copy of the booking, (which clearly showed that there were indeed eleven of us, all neatly paid up!). The centre was fully booked with water-skiing superstars competing in the European Championships, held in Plymouth that weekend. However, our booking was honoured, and we had a briefing over last orders in the bar, though no-one dared to ask where the water-skiers went!

Day 2: Friday 30th

We met at 7.30am for a fried breakfast followed by a kit check and loaded the boat. Despite an emphatic email suggesting everyone take their own food, only Emma and Ian had brought lunch so James kindly went on a sandwich run :-)

Force-four south-westerlies prevented us from reaching the Eddystone, so we were off at 9am to our alternative first dive site, the **James Egan Layne**. We arrived at the site with several of the group feeling the effect of the waves! (Again, despite the aforementioned email suggesting sea-sickness pills). However, we all managed the dive. It was a nice first dive, we explored the wreck and saw several star fish and huge shoals of bib, along with the familiar collection of ballan, cuckoo and goldsinny wrasse. The vis was pretty good, at 8m it was better than a couple of the dives Hannah did in Thailand! The bow of the wreck never ceases to awe-inspire, towering above the bottom at 18m. There is also lots of interesting wreckage along the port side on the sea bed, complete with life. We also did some of the easy swim-throughs on the way back to the shot at the bows, yielding an aerial view of the long-encrusted cargo of parts for army vehicles, tanks

and trains. Ian demonstrated his 'Titanic' pose at the top of the bows, before ascending the shot for safety stops at six.

Once we were all aboard the boat we headed for a sheltered bay for lunch where we were lucky enough to spot a Basking Shark.

The second dive was a relaxed rummage on the wreck of the french minesweeper **Le Poulmic**. This sank during the second world war after hitting a mine! Although very broken up, there is plenty of life. Not everyone found the main pieces of hull, but there are lots of beams, metal plates and isolated pieces of superstructure littered across the sea bed, with a maximum depth of around 17m. Numerous leopard spotted gobies to be seen. We arrived back at the Mount Batten Centre around 4pm where we wrote up our dives over a hot chocolate with marshmallows and cream :-). It was decided we would take the water taxi over the water for supper since Emma knew a good pizza restaurant.

Day 3: Saturday 31st

After another fantastic multi-course fry-up at Mount Batten, it was discovered that James' car had broken down (a problem with the starter motor). James and Hannah went off in search of sandwiches; the only cafe they found said it would be 20mins before he could start so it was no lunch today. We managed to get off at 9am again today as planned the water was much calmer, we saw fewer breakfasts re-emerge! In fact the wind had swung around to the north and dropped to force 2 - ideal for the Eddystone.

The first dive of the day was the **Eddystone reef**, which lies about 14 miles south of Plymouth Sound and is marked by a rather impressive lighthouse. Upon entering the water, we found the vis to be an outstanding 14m, with lots of light in the water giving it a glorious turquoise colour. Who says UK diving is dark and murky? On Pete's recommendation, we dived to the south of the reef, finding 17m at the bottom of the shot. Here lay huge gullies wallpapered with starfish and urchins, with fish aplenty lurking along the gravel bottoms. Again, huge numbers of cuckoo wrasse, of which at least one decided to bite Ian's finger! We all limited our depth to a 'nominal' 30m, honouring our promise to John, though it was very tempting to go deeper to explore the very bottom of some of the gullies... There were also dogfish, willing to be chased from trench to trench - all great fun. To the delight of his buddy, James even found a nudibranch sitting on a sponge. Ian ended his dive by demonstrating (successfully for once) to Matt the use of a delayed SMB. All agreed it was a fantastic dive.

We had a long break and went on to the second dive site. This was to be another scenic dive just off **Hilsea Rock Point**, a few hundred metres south of the Great Mewstone, on the Eastern side of the Sound. Again, the visibility was an exceptional 12m. This time the gullies were narrow and rugged, and overshadowed by kelp. It was possible to swim through the trenches beneath the kelp, which gave a strange feeling of swimming through a tunnel. Again, there were huge shoals of bib, and a self-imposed depth limit of 18m was again slightly restrictive. This time, it was Matt's turn to try the DSMB, which got to the surface - just (it had a decidedly limp appearance when we found it at 2 metres!). Oh, well... A very chilled out and relaxed dive...

After, we had snacks and looked at various fish books whilst writing up the logs. James called out the AA to fix his car, as it turned out all it needed was 'a knock with a hammer on the starter motor in the right place'. Half of us (the lazy half) stayed at Mount Batten for supper and a quiet evening: the others went over the water again.

Day 4: Sunday 1st

We still managed to be on the boat by 9am despite having to pack up the rooms. We headed out to the wreck of the **Persier**, which was to be our deepest dive of the trip at 30m. Again a casualty of the war, this lies in Bigbury Bay, and is fairly broken up, but very recognisable as a ship. Since the wind had risen overnight, it was a sheltered wreck to dive, but upon arrival, we were slightly disappointed to find that every other skipper in the area had had the same idea! By the end of the dive, there were no fewer than four boats on the wreck. As expected, the vis was a little stirred up due to the sheer number of divers, but a reasonable 6 to 8m still existed. As he confidently predicted, Pete had dropped his shot bang in the centre of the wreck just forward of the boilers. Upon arrival at the bottom, the intensity of the light was incredible, making a 30m depth seem more like 15m. Since this was a deep dive for many of our newer divers, careful plans were made and executed. In the event, it was a very easy dive. There was an enormous shoal of bib, which seemed to go on forever in all directions - completely spellbinding! We also found a velvet swimming crab perched in a crack. Further forward lay the remains of winching gear and the reared up plates from the bow. The only hiccup was a free-flowing club regulator. Although not a serious free-flow: at 30m, the only sensible option was to abort the dive.

Lunch consisted of pasties organised and heated up on board by Pete - they were yummy! (says Hannah)... The second dive of the day was **Fairy Lands**: a shallower site at around 18m, named after the stone ring on the adjacent hillside. There was plenty of colourful life. One unfortunate individual managed to lose his weight belt at the end of the dive and ascended perhaps faster than intended! (Fortunately without consequence).

We arrived back earlier, about 3ish, so those with a long journey could get away. We got everything washed and packed with only a hint of the CUUEG FF (Faff Factor)!! (Ian demonstrated the easy way to wash a drysuit - just get into the tub wearing it!) Everyone got home safely, even if some got hideously lost on the way out of Bristol, perhaps due to Hannah's appalling directions!

Ian, thanks for a great trip!

Thanks are also due to Pete Fergus, the skipper of dive vessel *Venture* for the superb hospitality during our weekend. Not only did he drop us in exactly the right place on each site, but he cooked lunch for us, not to mention endless tea and coffee. He also allowed us to drive the boat - how many skippers do that???

