



Malta  
16th-23rd March 2003

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Trip Report by Mark Jones *[and some bits by me! Matt Worsley]*

### Qualified Divers

- Sam Cox
- James Donnelly
- Geoff Elliot
- Cat Everard
- Michael "Fitz" Fitzpatrick
- Ellie Hyde
- Ian Hylands
- Mark Jones
- Ruth Seager
- Iain Smith
- Matt Worsley

### Sports Diver Trainees

- Marc Gillingwater
- Claire Mitchell
- Alex Ossa
- Thuchakorn Vachiramon

### Ocean and Sports Diver Trainees

- Sam Daines
- Mark Hallworth
- Jonathan Manning
- Nim De Mendonca
- Stuart Moore
- Andrew Peel
- Advait Siddharthan
- Sam Waller
- Cordula van Wyhe

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## Day 1: Sunday 16th March 2003

The trip started as always with an alarm call at some ridiculous time in the morning. A quick load of the car and off to Cambridge we sped. One quick stop and Sam D, Sam W and Nim fully loaded in the vehicle and we were off. A couple of hours later we arrived at Gatwick. After a brief pause we found Iain and Cat, then the fun began.

First txt message arrives Stuart and the other on the coach are running late. Once they arrived the checking of photos, QRB's medicals, starts with all sorts of problems. But after a quick dose of Iain and Cat all the issues are solved. A quick McDonald's and then it was time to check in. Check in was quick, well it was for everyone except Iain and myself, If I ever hear of a canister light again I think I might have to kill some one. Iain's canister light, my torch and DSMB Cylinder took 2 hours to get checked in. This left us just enough time to board the plane.

Once on board we did a quick head count and yep you guessed it we were one short. After a brief delay they arrived and the flight began. After some, and I use the term loosely, food was served, Iain started writing up his trip report. We landed at Malta to discover that it was raining. After a brief wait for a James to arrive and we left the airport for a nice gentle drive to the apartments, who am I trying to kid. The driver mad no attempt to avoid any pot holes at all, Iain then reassured me that this was normal and the real driving would start later. Arrival at the apartments, every one fights over a room and gets themselves settled in. Ready for the start of tomorrows diving.

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## Day 2: Monday 17th March 2003 - The Blue Grotto

Another early start and round to [MaltaAqua](#) we all troop. At this point we start with the paper work again, after much running around everyone has filled in all the paper work, hire kit, got cylinders etc, we load up the Maruti's and go out in search of a dive site. After some advise we head for St Elmo Bay Valletta to dive the HMS Maori on arrival at the site we were greeted with; No chance of diving that, so we trooped back in to the Marutis and set off again this time to Wied Iz Zurrieq aka the Blue Grotto, for a nice gentle check out dive.





The buddy pairs were lined up and off we set. First in was Matt and Fitz who managed to have their dive while the rest of us kitted up. Encouraged by the report that they had a good dive *[we did - lots of fish and a couple of big caves, swell was building on the way in - had to sit on the bottom and hold onto a rock to send the blob - Matt]*.

Myself, Sam (on her first sea dive) and Ruth set off for our dive. While we had a nice dive along the bottom, Iain, Cat and Ellie had entered the water behind us and 3 minutes later were getting out again because Cat's back had given out on her. As I understand it they had some 'fun' getting Cat out. So I guess that would be incident No 1 on day 1 of my marshalling.

While we were on the bottom I noticed that the swell was picking up and indicated to the others that we needed to head back in. We returned to the entry point and surface to be welcomed back to a change of the sea state. Iain indicated for Sam to swim to him and exit at that point but after a couple of attempts the swell got the better of that idea and we switched to the alternate plan and headed for the slipway.

Unfortunately Sam had taken a bit of a battering trying to exit and promptly breathed her cylinder down, Ruth gave Sam her long hose and we went round to the slip way. After much struggling we all made it up the slip way, with some help from Iain and everyone was out, minus 1 torch which had snapped it's clip.

Despite a valiant attempt *[erm... yes...]* to find the torch by Iain and myself, it was never seen again. It was at this point we gave up diving for the day and headed back to the apartments for a beer, food and to plan the next days diving.

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### Day 3: Tuesday 18th March 2003 - Ghar Lapsi

We woke and did the usual run around to sort kit, cylinders and food loaded for the day. As soon as this was finished we headed off to Ghar Lapsi.

Again I went out for a dive with Sam and Ruth. We had a nice relaxing dive and came back in after seeing some sand, not the worlds best dive. *[Fitz and I had a good dive in the morning. Only one minor shock after approaching the entrance to the cave that leads down from the "lagoon" and getting sucked in head first when a wave came over the top of the rocks. We had nice bimbles around the reefs and topped it off by successfully navigating back to the cave exit. Matt]*

The rest of the group had another dive in the afternoon, while I marshalled and provided surface cover. I believe the group had a good dive *[not as good as the morning dive, "one-star" as me and Fitz would say - Matt]*.



Geoff, Ruth, Fitz, Iain, Matt and Sam (Ghar Lapsi).

*[The afternoon did get interrupted by the rescue of two divers in the next cove along the coast. They had somehow managed to get stranded on the top of a stack next to the cliff, surrounded by a long fall and large waves. The helicopter crew successfully recovered both the divers along with all of their equipment... Matt]*



Winched up by an air-sea rescue helicopter: not what you'd call a planned exit from a dive.



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#### Day 4: Wednesday 19th March 2003 - Cirkewwa

Today we went out to Cirkewwa to dive the general area but especially the tug Rozi. Two groups of divers headed out to the Rozi for their first dive. Group one was Matt, Fitz, Ruth and Ellie. The second group was myself, Iain and Cat.

*[Superb dive! The happy four surface-swam out to the channel buoy and then descended down to 25m and swam into the blueness (330° if you're interested). After a couple of mins you go over the anchor and then the wreck of the Rozi (the deck is at about 33m). Had a good lap of the wreck - which was covered in fire worms and surrounded by little fish - and then headed back the way we came. Matt.]*

Our little group headed on over there using DPV's. On decent near the wreck, the first thing that came to view in the clear waters was the large anchor, a fantastic site but unfortunately I didn't get the time to photograph it. We headed over to the wreck and had just settled on to the wreck, when we had a problem. I had just started taken some photos when Cat's DPV stuck on and she had trouble controlling it. Iain took over and managed to get it turned off. At this point cat had some problems with her dry suit and the dive was aborted.



Iain on the trip out to the Maori on DPVs.

Again I marshalled for the afternoon and the other had a dive in the area finding the statue of the Madonna, I believe.

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#### Day 5: Thursday 20th March 2003 - Lantern Point and Comino Caves

Today we did some boat dives off Lantern Point and the Comino caves. We were diving from the Comino Ferry that we had booked for the day. The first dive was nice dive on a reef, with some of the more experience members of the group descending down a chimney, out and

over the reef. *[Lucky sods! we couldn't find the chimney and decided to drop over the edge of reef and do a wall dive instead. Matt.]*

While on the top of the reef I managed to find quite a large stone fish. The only down side with the dive was that the current was quite strong causing a fun surface swim back to the boat. We stopped for lunch at the Blue lagoon, he lain decided to have a swim, he jumped in, turned round swim back to the boat climbed in and muttered something about the temperature before heading over for lunch.



The Blue Lagoon, nice spot for a bit of lunch.

The afternoon dive was at the Comino Caves, these were explored by the group while, Sam and myself, explored the area in front of the caves and used the time to experiment with our new camera. The condition on the afternoon dive was excellent, great viz, no current, sunny day, Fantastic. *[Here here, the caves were amazing and the water was crystal clear. A definite "many-stars" dive for myself, Fitz, Ruth and Ellie, topped off when Ellie spotted an octopus curled up on a rock just beyond "Zorro's Window". Matt.]*

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## Day 6: Friday 21st March 2003 - The Azure Window and the Blue Hole, and the Inland Sea, Gozo

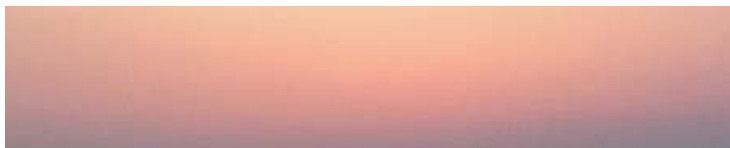
The day started at 0545, myself, Iain and Cat got up and after a nice cooked breakfast from Sam, the 3 of us loaded the Maruti and headed off to get the early ferry to Gozo. An uneventful trip later we reached the Blue Hole / Inland Sea. A quick chat with some local divers and a minor change to the dive plan and we were set. However first came the long hike moving all the kit from the Maruti across the rock terrain and down to the blue hole to establish a base camp. I wouldn't say it was hard work but by the time we moved everything and kitted up the others had just arrived. Before we could be called to help we slipped below the surface and started what was to become the best dive of the whole trip. *[Speak for yourself, I'd vote for the Rozi or Comino Caves, but then again I didn't get to see the seahorse... Matt.]*

We went through the coral gardens and dropped down to enter the coral cave, in search of the 2 seahorses that the locals had told us was there. After checking lights and camera we entered the cave. Iain slightly in front started a systematic search. After a very short time we located a yellow seahorse. We put plenty of light in the general area and I set the camera ready and took the picture. It wasn't until we reached the surface and reviewed the picture that we realised how good it was. Much to the disgust of the rest of the group who were doing a different dive and were not going to see it.

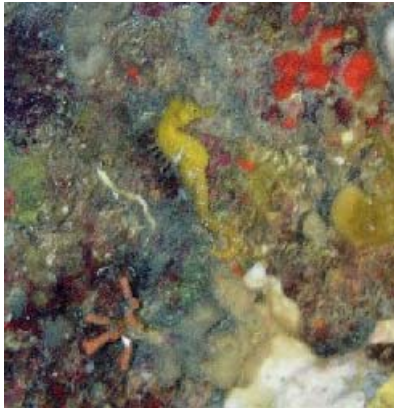
After finding the seahorse we continued to search the cave. Iain had a look down a small side tunnel but it didn't go anywhere so he reversed out and we continued. After exploring the whole cave. we headed back to the seahorse for another extended look. We headed out of the cave and took a picture of Iain posing only to discover a slight trickle of water inside the camera housing. At this point I indicated to Iain it was time to surface (funny that, £600 Camera makes me a bit nervous).

We started Iain's decompression schedule keeping a close eye on the camera. While Iain was busy with all his run times, all I had to do was stay with him as my computer was still happily inside it's no stop time, giving me the opportunity to have a good luck round. During this time I managed to see what appeared to be a black octopus and a scorpion fish, neither I managed to get a photo of, or show to Iain. We surfaced just in time for me to take on the role of Dive Marshall and start approving the next 2 waves of dives. *[I think the rest of us all did dives from the Blue Hole, a small pool and vertical cave which has an opening out into the bay (it also has a large cavern a little deeper too). Out in the bay there's plenty to see and you can work leftwards along the rocks or rightwards around and under the Azure Window (a huge natural arch above the water). For some pics take a look [here](#) or [here](#). Matt]*

Next dive was with Sam and Claire. Iain had a third dive (2nd for most of the group) exploring the long tunnel from the inland sea out to the main sea. After this dive all the kit was packed and we headed back. After the ferry, shower etc it was quiet late, so we headed out for food, finally having a Chinese at about 2330, however it was a good meal at the end of a good days diving.



The seahorse and the



evening sunset from Gozo. [Ruth, Geoff and I are out under that sea somewhere on our dive from the Inland Sea. Matt.]

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## Day 7: Saturday 22nd March 2003 - HMS Maori

I didn't dive this day but some of the group took the chance to get a last dive in.

We headed over to St Elmo Bay Valletta to dive the HMS Maori. After some planning at the site the groups of divers headed in and dived the Maori. Upon return I was gutted that I hadn't dive. The vis was great [erm...] and everyone reported that it had been a fantastic dive.



Hardcore dive planning (note the bottle of Cisk was being drunk by a someone not planning on getting wet!)

[I was diving with Ellie and had a really chilled out visit to the Maori, a Tribal class Royal Navy Destroyer that was bombed and sank in Valletta Harbour in February 1942. She only lies in 15m of water and is great dive although the sandy bottom means this vis can be variable. There are no guns and the wreck is badly damaged but there's plenty to explore and a couple of decent swim-throughs to do. (To get to the wreck easily enter at the steps and swim out on 030° until you go over the drop-off, the Maori is dead ahead.) Matt]

At this point all the kit was returned, rooms cleaned etc. That evening we had a meal with MaltaAqua staff, taking over a good portion of the restaurant. Unfortunately for me after the meal I became very ill, word of warning, be careful of the prawns, well that's what I think it was...

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## Day 8: Sunday 23rd March 2003

My recollection of this day, is not that great, all I remeber is being very ill, getting up very early with a flight back to the UK. Thankfully by the time we reached Gatwick I was feeling somewhat better and we started the long journey home, dropping people off on the way.

Generally it had been a successfull trip:

- I had done the marshalling I wanted to do.
- Sam had completed her first sea dives.
- The trainees had completed their training dives.
- Some excellent diving had been completed.

As you would expect with a group this size there had been some friction and problems but I have no intention of listing them here. All that matters was that they were solved as they happened and some excellent diving was had by all. [I agree, think plenty of lessons can/have been learned both under/above the water. Matt.]

For myself and Sam we are hoping the trip run's again next year as we want to return.

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## **Some links**

[Malta pics on Mark's website](#)

[MaltAqua's Malta guide](#)

[Diving Malta photos](#)