



Easter Open Water Training Expedition Porthkerris, Cornwall, 13th-21st March 2004

Let's be efficient...

[Trip Report Index](#)

**Organised by John Kendall
Trip Report by Matt Worsley**

The cast...

Trainees

- Lucy "you just have to look more carefully..." Alford
- Lis "I CAN drive [you misogynistic b*stard]" Bowman
- Ruth "quiet diver #1" Corrigan
- Anne-Marie "Harbinger of Doom" Cumberlidge
- Alun "two crotchstraps" Harford
- Claire "quiet diver #2" Kelly
- "Action Dan" Reynolds
- Shi Jie "quiet diver #3" Wong
- Rosie "She's dead Dave"^[1] Whitaker
- Bob "He's dead Dave"^[2]

The rest of us

- Ian "VSOP" Gregory
- Mark "works on so many levels" Jones
- John "I can do smooth or I can do nearly there!" Kendall
- Josh "limpet boy" Robinson
- Iain "you only had one job..." Smith
- Matt "scissorhands" Worsley

[1] "She's dead Dave. Dave, she's Dead. She's dead Dave: She is dead Dave!"

[2] "He's dead Dave. Dave, he's Dead. He's dead Dave: He is dead Dave!"

Day 1: Saturday 13th March CUUEG: A New Hope

[Cue appropriate rousing theme tune]:

Not so very long ago in a county far, far away...

It is a period of civil war. Rebel divers, striking from a hidden base, have won their first victory against the evil Sports Diver syllabus.

During the training battle, Rebel spies managed to steal the plans to the Empire's ultimate weapon, the RUSSIAN REBREATHER, an oddly shaped metal box with enough hazards to stop a trainee in their tracks.

Fighting against the huge list of boxes to tick, Prince JK and his band of instructors race towards signing logbooks, custodians of the special signatures and the secret plans that can save the trainees and restore fresh divers to the Club...

And so it was; 5 instructors, 9 trainees, plastic Bob and a Josh set off on their epic adventure. We met at the kitstore at 8am on a cold and drizzly Saturday morning. Other than a rather late Dan rocking up several minutes after we'd planned to leave, nothing had yet gone wrong and soon a minibus, a van and Iain's car we bombing it down the M11 towards London.

Although not the biggest van in the world it seemed to cope okay with all our cylinders and most of the kit. The minibus was brand new and it only took a few seconds into the journey before John warned everyone with the consequences of making a mess in it. The journey was fine although an Oxford detour was needed to avoid a closed section of the M4. We stopped at Leigh Delamere for a greasy lunch and continued into no-mans land beyond Bristol. Sing songs, crosswords and stereos provided the entertainment although JK, Ian, Matt and most of the 2nd row in the bus succumbed to a 90 minute game of "I spy..."

By the time we got to Truro's Tesco for the shopping ("No Dan, you can pay for the steak yourself" [this isn't the last some of us saw of the steak either]) it was getting very dark...

John: "erm, I don't know where we're going..."

Matt & Ian: "you mean we have all these lovely maps of the optimum route on the motorway and no map to the actual caravan site then?"

John: "yes... do we know the address?..."

A trip to the petrol station for directions, two failed camp site attempts and several phone calls later we were finally heading in the right direction towards the [Franchis Holidays](#) site in Mullion. As the convoy tore around the dark country roads JK asked Matt to phone Iain and relay the first in a series of John-to-Iain-via-Matt-and-Josh messages...

John: "Stop driving so bloody close - you're blinding me!"

Iain: "I wouldn't need to if you didn't buggler off around every corner whilst we're trying to follow!"

John: "Look, you only had one job to do, and you can't even do that properly! How hard is it to follow a f**king great white van?"

[sometime later] Iain: "I've dipped my headlights now: does that help?"

Finally, and with humour already becoming a theme for the week, we arrived and piled into the rather cushy caravans; Iain, Matt, Josh and Alun in the first; Ian, Shi Jie, Ruth and Dan in the second; John, Lucy and Rosie in the third; and Mark, Lis, Anne-Marie and Claire in the fourth. Kettle on, sleeping bags ready, lights out...

Day 2: Sunday 14th March "John doesn't seem to be feeling very well Matt..."

We awoke to bleeping alarm clocks and freezing caravans but soon an enthusiastic and well-fed bunch of divers were again in convoy, heading over the Goonhilly Downs towards the other side of the Lizard. We entered the quiet Cornish village of St Keverne - the odd local in sight - when a battered three-wheeler stopped to let us by. It was at this moment Ian voiced his legendary observation,

"Oh my god - even the cars are inbred."

By the time we'd finished chuckling we'd gone down the hill and arrived at [Porthkerris Divers](#) situated just up the hill from the rather scenic Porthkerris Cove. Given the blustery wind and no-so-ideal conditions we headed around the corner to the smaller beach next to the MOD Search and Rescue Divers Compound. Despite the still-not-so-quite-ideal conditions things seemed very exciting and John declared, "Let's be efficient and get kitted up nice and quickly." Now any CUUEG veterans amongst you will know that if there's one thing we just never manage, it's efficiency...



Faff... also known as pre-dive preparation!

The first few pairs fought their way through the surf and got out into the water. Unfortunately by all accounts the swell was rather difficult and the visibility was terrible. The greatest issue, however, was in getting everyone safely out through the surf. The tried and tested method of hang on to the diver and make them crawl up the beach was working wonders, that is until JK's fins were removed a bit too early and a huge breaker decided to give him a ride... Despite giving the mask-less DO a bloody nose it wasn't long before things were sorted out and everyone safely ashore.

Phew, thought Matt, that was a bit close. Never mind. That was until Ian tapped him on the shoulder, "John doesn't seem to be feeling very well Matt." Given the absolute stone-faceness, and the fact that only the day before we'd been discussing the merits of PRM scenarios with no warning, it didn't take long for it to dawn what was going on...

Things seemed to work fairly well given half of the people involved didn't initially realise that the requests for an ambulance, oxygen and the first aid kit, were all in aid of Matt's surprise rescue management exercise. After persuading Dan that "no, we don't really need an ambulance" and "yes, you can TURN THE OXYGEN OFF!"; as well as prodding, poking, splinting and lifting JK endlessly; everything wound up and we packed away. Please note that Matt would like to apologise for any of the insulting phrases issued to the instigators of his surprise scenario and much credit is due to JK who managed to remain (mostly) calm at the threats we made to cut-off his drysuit.

Day 3: Monday 15th March

The steak returns (well, more specifically, the steak never left)

Everyone in Dan's caravan needs no reminding, and the reader will be spared the details, other than to say that Dan's steak was a little too much for the sewage pipe. We set off for Porthkerris as the problem was being disposed of. The weather was much more sensible, although it was still quite blustery. Again we headed to the small beach and organised ourselves into two waves for the morning dive.

The diving in the cove area is all shallow. The pebbly beach slowly falls off into various patches of sand, pebble and kelp in depths of 5-10m. The most interesting areas are around the large rock outcrop on the left-hand-side (northern) part of the small cove. Although slightly shallower there are a number of gullies in the rock and there is plenty of marine life - starfish, common urchins and anemones all are in abundance, along with the odd wrasse, cotton-spinners and blennys. The swell can be fairly considerable and the incoming tide can also cause quite a current through the area between the rocks; that said it was never anything particularly difficult to deal with.



Looking north from the main beach towards Falmouth. The smaller cove is between the rocks on the left hand side of the picture.

Everyone seemed happy to be getting wet today although the wind still made it difficult for trainees learning how to enter and exit onto the shore safely. Some lucky people even managed to get a tow into the shore after a long and tiring swim back through the outgoing tide. Anyway, some Ocean Diver boxes (mask clearing, DV recovery and the like) ticked, we headed back to Franchis for a tasty communal dinner of Thai Curry, with everyone grateful to Lis and her band of recruited chefs. The only remaining point of note is a conversation between Josh and JK, with John making a succinct statement about Josh's beard,

John: "I'm not into beards"

Ian: "Not that sort of beard anyway..."

Day 4: Tuesday 16th March

CBLs, damp suits and plastic cheese

In a groundbreaking experiment we decided to dive from the main beach today, conditions being slightly better. Given that the morning training included lots of CBL, AV and towing training it was also much more suited to the gentler slope of the beach and the extra space. Some sunshine even decided to make an appearance today and the wind again was lighter than Monday, prospects for Wednesday were looking even better.

We set about putting sets together in the sunshine. Matt needed some help gaffer taping his fin straps and recruited Anne-Marie to hold the tape whilst he cut. Now all would have been fine if Matt took a little more care in exactly where he was cutting... A "satisfying snip" and sudden loud yelp marked the moment when Anne-Marie's unfortunate fingers accidentally became the next chopping point. A trip to the first aid kit and several hundred apologies later Matt retreated, vowing to buy Anne-Marie a drink in compensation!

Today was the day that Bob (named after his favourite activity) got his first open water dive too. In case you were wondering, Bob is the full-sized in-water CUUEG manakin for rescue and AV practice. Mark and John watched with amusement as Bob was towed out into the bay for Dan to use in his CBL-tow-land drill. Although rather overweight Bob worked well, and didn't complain once as he was battered by the waves and given facefulls of seawater!

The number of not-so-dry-drysuits was increasing rapidly, with damp arms on display by Lucy, Shi Jie and Ian along with a rather wet back and leg by Matt. The latter (and most irritating) problem having been caused by a sharp edge to a lead block on a weightbelt. The holes being revealed later using JKs technique of block the wrists, block the neck, inflate the suit and smear with washing-up liquid. Fortunately the temporary patch worked a treat. The elastic bands round the wrist method and others also apparently proved fairly useful with some of the other damp suits too.

Following our lunch of bread (butter spread by credit card/finger/mixed with vaseline on a dive knife), ham, fruit and the infamous plastic cheese (of Easter trips to Malta gone by) we set about changing cylinders and wringing undersuits. The afternoon dives covered various exercises, most notably compass work, the mere suggestion of which was enough to prompt John to declare, "I'm not doing them.

Compass never work near me": Clearly a magnetic personality there. The main bay, incidentally, is quite a good site for compass training, certainly it's the only way to distinguish one bit of sodding kelp from another.

The only notable quote from today followed from Iain's remark to Lucy...

Iain: "Blimey! you're not wearing any pink today"

JK: "Ah, you just need to look harder"

...Shocking, and these people are supposed to be in charge. :-)

The rather late evening meal was of bangers and mash, lovingly cooked by John. By most accounts it was very tasty although some very nackered and slightly grumpy instructors only got to see the luke-warm tail-end of the dinner by the time the instructor meeting finished sometime around midnight.

Day 5: Wednesday 17th March

Line laying and chilli

Today, in diving terms, was probably the best day of the week. Overcast and a little damp at times but the wind was negligible and surface conditions and visibility were as good as it got. The morning diving consisted of various exercises although most people were doing line laying. Following a demonstration of the principles the various pairs dispersed around the car park and set-about line laying from rock to post to fence!

The line laying in the water by all accounts turned out to be no more imaginative than the land version, with Kelp stalks being the principal tie-off points... oh well. After the standard picnic lunch out of the spare green dive box the afternoon was spent doing various dives to cover the different gaps people had in their training.

Tonight saw the much-hyped production of the John Kendall chilli avec John's HotSauce™. Hot sauce is a very well earned title by the way: literally one quarter of a teaspoon can raise a bowlful of chilli from warm to hot, pushing that to a whole half teaspoon can result in seriously corrosive consequences (to both cutlery, tastebuds and erm, digestive system components). Well done to the budding chef, the meal certainly proved at least as effective as Sudafed in fixing the sinuses - maybe there's potential there.



Sports Diver Quiz Q1: "How do you phone 999 on this phone when it only has buttons 1-3?"

Day 6: Thursday 18th March

3 days to go...

Thursday dawned a very similar day to Wednesday - cool, overcast but generally dry. In well practised (but with the same CUUEG-style delays as ever) we filled the van and piled into the minibus for the short journey over to Porthkerris. The morning dives were once again all covering different things, from mask-clearing lessons (of doom) to AAS ascents and casualty landings. It was good to see so much progression in the training, the new crop of divers were all very much on their way to qualification.





Claire rescues Lucy: in water towing and artificial ventilation followed by kit removal and a safe landing onto the beach.

In a shocking change to the usual prescription the lunchtime picnic was today held on the floor between the van and the minibus, how exciting eh? On the plus side quite a lot of people went up to the restaurant at the dive centre (they do quite a mean Cornish pasty and chips) thus leaving lots of food for those of us who remained. All was sedentry until...

Iain to Mark: "Mark, how come you can get away with things my fiancée wouldn't allow me to?"

[group silence and then] Matt: "It's because you're an adult, Iain."

[group laughter]

Iain: "Oh, it works on so many levels."

(Maybe you had to have been there.)

The afternoon dives were all quite chilled out, a lot of them with a "let's just have a nice dive" philosophy, a good thing too otherwise everyone ends up forgetting that diving is all about having fun and not about sitting on the bottom and purposefully flooding your mask! Alun, Shi Jie and Matt went out on a bumble around the outmost set of rocks and found the (relatively) impressive gully that leads out into the kelp fields beyond (credit to JK - the gully discoverer - for the directions). The visibility was fairly impressive, maybe touching 10m, and there's quite a lot of interesting life to see.

The second comedy award of the day goes to John whilst driving the minibus back that evening. Rosie has been rather ill all week and was feeling particularly sick during the journey - being sat in a sweaty minibus being driven by John around the Cornish roads really wasn't helping. Iain requested a reduction in speed around the corners to make the ride "smoother" only seconds after someone else had moaned "god, aren't we there yet?"...

John: "Look, I can do smooth or I can do nearly there! What do you want?!"

Josh took control of the kitchen(s) tonight and conjured up a tomatoey-tunary-herby-pasta-thing. A slightly less anti-social bedtime was managed tonight, with the promise of some RIB-diving on the Mannacles on Friday... hooray, proper diving!...

Day 7: Friday 19th March

The Oxygen Administration Course

Alas the gods of driving rain, pounding wind and swelly seas decided to rear their ugly heads today. Such is life, so by 10am and several cups of tea later it was decided that we should run the Oxygen Administration Course and at least try and salvage something from the day. The trainees split into two groups and lectures and practical sessions were put together in the different caravans. Everything ran surprisingly smoothly and to be honest it was all quite good fun.

The green dive box picnic was recovered from the van and we ate the contents in one of the caravans. Iain decided the post-lunch lull would be a good time to run through the practical session of analysing nitrox (part of the nitrox course he'd be covering during the week). Soon enough a stage tank of 50% and Matt's unused cylinder of Nitrox-40 were retrieved from the van to be practised with... Not that it stayed quite that way for long, after watching for a couple of painful minutes whilst his tasty nitrox escaped through the analysers Matt quickly decided it was well worth the short walk through the rain to swap his cylinder for another stage bottle!

The lectures and practicals continued late into the afternoon, culminating with the short multiple-guess theory paper and the scenario practice. The scenarios proving to be great fun for Iain and JK who took great delight in feigning not only the diving injuries but any nautical accompaniments they could think of: drunken Norweigen boat skippers and radio messages with the wall didn't cause too many problems but a rhythmic side-to-side swaying soon induced sea-sickness in a number of the scenario participants... and this was in a static caravan! Well done to all concerned in passing the tests though, if you can cope with Iain and John you can probably cope with anything! :-)

We settled down to a well earned tikka masala after the course wound-up, all of us except Iain that is, who had already left on a marathon drive back to civilisation ahead of his MA graduation ceremony on Saturday. Now this isn't particularly amusing unless you were there, but it's here as an eternal reminder...

Alun [assuredly]: "Well, your average piece of diving equipment costs £400"

All: "Like what? Name one! An O-ring at 20p or a scooter at £3000?"

Day 8: Saturday 20th March

Jon Bon Jovi Day

In true Cornish style Friday turned about to be a dry and even vaguely bright morning. We headed down to the main beach once again to do one final dive before using the afternoon to clean up/pack up before the evening entertainment. For almost all the dives the aim was "enjoy it and hopefully gain some depth experience and simulated deco stop practice." That was the theory anyway, in practice the dives all generally consisted of swimming over the kelp beds in search of anything deeper than 10m! Oh well, all was not lost because goal number one had been satisfied and everyone enjoyed not having lots of drills to practice. Plenty to look at out amongst the rocks and kelp though - urchins, anenomes, starfish, nudibranchs all quite common.

The great search for depth coupled with the rising tide meant everyone had a longish surface swim to get back to the shore but people seemed happy. We ate our final picnic out on the pebbly beach before scrawling a message in the sand and taking a group photo. Now with our backs to the incoming sea this was cue some "keep going, still can't fit you all in, go back" attempts but nobody was fooled, maybe next time...



Alun, Ian, Matt, John, Anne-Marie, Claire, Ruth, Josh, Lis, Dan, Shi Jie

We packed up for the final time and headed off back up the hill in the van, stopping briefly to take some photos of the Cove from the laybay. On the way back we stopped off at the Goonhilly Satellite Earth Station - the vague plan was to go on a tour of the visitors' centre but that was abandoned when we saw the entrance fees! In the end we went straight back to the caravans to get on with the tidying-up. In possibly our most efficient couple of hours all week, we cleaned the caravans, sorted the kit and loaded both van and minibus. All ready to leave Sunday morning and leaving us with nothing to do but get ready to go out...

The culmination of the week was a meal out at the local pub (and a very tasty meal it was too) and the alcohol narcosis began to accumulate... We didn't stay long after the meal, since John wanted to drive us all back to he could join our descent (we're all on 2 pints or 20m equivalent by this stage!). Back in Ian's caravan we got stuck into our stash of lager, mead, smirnoff ice and coca cola. Chuckles became laughs which became fits of giggles as we discussed the various humorous events of the trip. The background music courtesy of Dan's laptop then started playing "Living on a Prayer" by Bon Jovi and it didn't take very long for the lyrics to the following tongue-in-cheek rendition to come about...

"Running out of air"
(to Bon Jovi "Living on a Prayer")
(full lyrics courtesy of Ian Gregory)

(Musical intro)

'O'-ring in the high pres-sure hose.
Your air is pissin' out: the con-tents gauge fallin' down low
So low

Forty minutes deco away
We can't surface yet, your nitro-gen all must un-load
Un-load

Oh you've gotta breathe now, on what you've got,
It doesn't make a difference if you spasm or not.
We've got each other, so that's al-right - for gas

We'll give it a shot.
Oh, you've nitrox there
Oh-oh, running out of air.
Take my reg, we'll make it I swear,
Oh-oh, running out of air.

Arriving at the six metre stop,
Can't surface yet, we should send a blob for some air
Some air

Scared and all your stage gas is gone,
Buddy breathing now, fine - buddy it's all o-kay
O-kay

We've gotta breathe now, on what we've got,
It doesn't make a difference if we bubble or not.
We've got a chamber, so that's al-right - and a chopper
We'll go in the pot.
Oh, we're halfway there
Oh-oh, running out of air.
Take my reg, we'll make it I swear,
Oh-oh, running out of air.
Running out of air-air-air

(musical interlude)

Oh we're gonna sur-face, ready or not,
Our blood's gonna boil now, let's give it a shot!

Oh, we're halfway there
Oh-oh, running out of air.
Take my reg, and we'll make it I swear,
Oh-oh, running out of air.

Oh, we're halfway there
Oh-oh, running out of air.
Take my reg, and we'll make it I swear,
Oh-oh, running out of air.

Oh, we're halfway there
Oh-oh, running out of air

(fade out)

Day 9: Sunday 21st March

Hometime

Hangovers under control we managed to get away sometime around 9.30 or so. The drive back didn't seem as epic as the drive down to Cornwall but it still took up most of the day, stopping for some greasy lunch on the way. Kit unloading back at the store all went without a hitch though we did have to blow off the 15L air cylinder that, despite carrying a rather oversized "breathing air" wrap, had still somehow been accidentally filled with Nitrox-43. Oops.

And that's the End; Now Prince JK and his band of instructors didn't quite manage to finish off the Sport Diver syllabus, but the evil RUSSIAN REBREATHING was certainly stopped in its tracks, and a new bunch of fresh divers have been restored to the club. Clearly this reeks of an Episode II (presumably involving more of the rebreather and Ewoks), so stay tuned for next's years training trip. Who knows, maybe they'll even be an extended edition trip report coming out in a few months.

Thanks to John for organising, the instructors for giving their time to teach, the trainees for being so enthusiastic, the chefs for the cooking, the drivers for the driving and to everyone for a great laugh.

