



**Portland**  
**24-25th July 2004**

[Trip Report Index](#)

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## Trip Report by John Kendall

### Divers:

- John Kendall
- David Martin
- Iain Smith

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This dive trip was under the auspices of both CUUEG and Underwater Explorers - UK (SAA 1025). It was therefore an unexpected pleasure to meet two other UE-UK club members, Joao and Hamish, who had also booked onto the U-772 dive. Hopefully we avoided embarrassing ourselves and CUUEG!

As often is the case on these trips, the planning started a couple of weeks in advance with a conversation along the lines of:

"We're going down to weymouth soon aren't we?"

"Yes"

"Best get some gas then"

"Yes"

"Ah, and we're going to need an extra twinset each"

"oh, yeah, I suppose we will"

Followed by a frantic exchange of phone calls and emails in order to arrange a last minute delivery of helium, because we hadn't planned it far enough in advance and our contact was out of the country. Many thanks to him for being messed around...again.

So, we ordered our gas, hired a twinset from UE (which they got filled for us to pick up on the saturday) and blended up our first day's back gas (18/45 for the U772 and 21/35 for the P555) and our stages.

Then came the transport arrangements. Iain knew he would be finishing work between 5pm and 11pm but didn't know when until he finished. So plan A was for David to drive down early to get the keys, and JK and Iain to follow when Iain finished. We were all quite suprised when Iain phone at 5pm to say he was finished. So plan B was triggered; we all went in JK's car. 21 Cylinders (5 twinsets, 7 7L stages, 3 1L argon bottles, and a 15L to fill them) were loaded. Then O<sub>2</sub> kit, 3 Kit boxes, 3 drysuits, 3 Pro 14's, and then a few other bits. This is the point that a Citroen Xantia - with it's amazing self levelling suspension - comes into its own.

So we leave cambridge at about 7ish, and get to breakwater at 11:15ish. Quick fruit juice before bed.

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### Dive 1

#### U772

**Depth:** 53.8m

**Boat:** Maverick

**Bottom Time:** 20min

**Mix:** 18/45 + 50% + 100%

**Deco:** 1@30, 1@27, 1@24, 5@21 (50%), 1@18, 2@15, 2@12, 5@9, 15@6 (100%)

We have been trying for a couple of years to get on this wreck, but the weather has caused us to miss it everytime. Not today however, when we awoke we looked out of the hotel window to see a mirror-calm sea. This was also our first dive when we needed to use O<sub>2</sub> stages as well as the 50% bottles; so, all in all, we were a little nervous about it. This was not made much better by the 4 failed attempts to shot the wreck. Slack water seemed to be about 3/4 hour late, and the shot kept getting pulled off the wreck. On the 5th attempt it stuck, so we Kitted up, clipped on stages, tried to stand up. Failed. Tried again harder.

It is interesting how one more stage really makes a difference to ones ability to stand on a moving boat. As we jumped in, I felt a slight trickle of water down my neck. Not an issue I thought, as my neck seal needs replacing fairly soon and I often get this on entry. Down the shot we went (which was about 10m too long, so was quite hard work), bubble check at 6m, and then down to the wreck.

The shot was just near to the break in the pressure hull that allows you to get inside. We went and had a look and it felt completely natural to

have a look through the hatch that leads in to the next compartment. We were all completely clear headed (oh, the joys of 18/45 trimix!) and were very tempted to penetrate further, but were sufficiently clear headed not to do so, what with this being our deepest ever dive!

Fortunately there were many other interesting things to see, so we left the penetration for next time :-). We then swam along the hull, past the conning tower. The Attack Periscope is extended, and the glass on the Spotter Scope is missing, however, the prism is still there, albeit very scratched, and covered in barnacles.

We then swam towards the stern and saw one of the props. At this point I called the dive, as over the last few minutes the trickle of water into my suit had started getting worse. So we aborted at that point, and headed up. As we ascended I was finding it harder and harder to stay horizontal, as my legs were filling with water.

By the time we got to 9m for a backgas break I was really quite cold, and by the end of 10mins at 6m on O<sub>2</sub> was shivering a bit (we had aborted the dive with about 20mins on the bottom, and cut our 6m stop down to 10mins). Had we had more deco to do I suspect I would have aborted and gone onto O<sub>2</sub> at the surface. When I finally got back onto the boat, and took my suit off I poured about 2L of water out of it. It was unpleasant.

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## Dive 2

**P555**

**Depth:** 45m

**Boat:** Maverick

**Bottom Time:** 28min

**Mix:** 21/35 + 50% + 100%

**Deco:** 1@24, 5@21 (50%), 1@18, 1@15, 2@12, 5@9, 10@6 (100%)

Over lunch we had our 50% bottles refilled, and swapped for our 2nd twinsets. I also had a chance to try and dry out my undersuit - luckily it was quite warm and sunny. This afternoon we had the boat to ourselves, due to 4 other divers dropping out. It was a luxury that we could get used to quite easily. The sea was a little rougher on this dive, so David and I didn't feel quite right. We got to the site, and Andy put the shot in. The P555 lies along the tide, so is quite hard to shot, however he got within about 5m of the stern of the sub.

Dropped in, bubble check, and then down to the bottom. I "sensed" which direction the wreck would be, and headed off, only to be stopped and dragged back by Iain, who had spotted that the ball of light from David's torch had reached the bottom of the shotline...and stopped.

It turns out that David had not been quite as ready as he had thought and, as the boat's siren went to tell us to jump in, he had realised that his computers were still in his pocket. While Iain knew about this, I didn't and leapt in. As we all arrived at the seabed at the same time, I headed straight off, not aware that David was planning to stop and put his computers on before doing anything else.

Once that was sorted, we swam along the port side of the wreck, staying fairly close to the seabed as there was still a bit of a current. Interestingly, we all felt that the narcosis on this dive was considerably greater than on the deeper morning dive, probably because of the considerable exertion and CO<sub>2</sub> production involved in getting down to the wreck on an overly-long shotline and against a fast current.

Once this subsided we moved up onto the deck; went all the way along the port side, looking at the hatches on the foredeck; before dropping down under the bows and having a look at the torpedo tubes on the way past. We then headed back along the starboard side, and had a nose around the conning tower.

Iain spotted a possible opening and decided to have a quick look to see if there were any ways into the wreck, but whilst he was doing this, I got a signal from David. "There's something wrong," and he pointed to his inflator. I noticed the corrugated hose was not attached. Hmmm, 1min of bottom time left, Iain is upside down in a hole, and David's inflator had fallen off.

A quick bodge got the inflator back on the hose (later properly secured with a couple of new cable-ties), and we started the ascent (Iain had got himself out of his hole). As this was the second reasonably deep dive of the day, we again used both 50% and O<sub>2</sub> for deco. The deco went without a hitch, although David was a little nervous every time he touched his inflator.

That evening we went into Weymouth and found a chippy for supper. Weymouth was very busy, and apparently quite popular with Hen nights, as David found out, when he got his arse pinched by one group. It wasn't until the next day that we discovered that they had stuck a smiley face sticker on him as well.

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## Dive 3

**Aeolian Sky**

**Depth:** 30m

**Boat:** Maverick

**Bottom Time:** 35min at 30m then 14min at 21m (still on the wreck)

**Mix:** 21/35 + 50%

**Deco:** 1@18 (50%), 1@15, 2@12, 5@9, 10@6

We were supposed to be diving the A3 this morning, but when our quite full boat got out to the site, there was already a boat there, so our 12 divers, plus 12 from another boat on a sub that is only about 100' long would have been a bit silly. We therefore diverted to the Aeolian Sky.

Amazingly none of the three of us had ever dived this wreck. It's a large cargo ship, most of the accommodation block is still fairly intact, and offers some very nice penetrations. It would be rude not to take advantage of these. Although there were several other boats diving the Sky, but despite this we saw very few other divers underwater. This might have had something to do with us being inside for most of the dive.

We "landed" near the stern of the wreck and saw some enormous winching gear and mooring bollards. We then moved to the accommodation block and immediately found a penetration, though this unfortunately narrowed down inside until it was too small for three divers with two stages. However, we then found a corridor which went down through a bulkhead into a further room. There were certainly three decks of the accommodation block that we didn't manage to find a way into, so something of a challenge when we next find ourselves there.

In hindsight, we had planned slightly too long a runtime for this one, as when we came out of the wreck to blob off, there was a ripping current, and we got pulled quite quickly away from the wreck on the deco. The journey back was a little lumpy.

Note: it is probably worth having a good look around this wreck from the outside before penetrating it. You could quite easily do several dives on this wreck without getting bored, so there's no question of wasting a dive by not going inside!

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#### **Dive 4**

##### **Sidon**

**Depth:** 36m

**Boat:** Top Gun

**Bottom Time:** 35min

**Mix:** 30/20 + 50%

**Deco:** 1@18 (50%), 1@15, 3@12, 3@9, 10@6

For this dive we were on Top Gun, and again had the boat to ourselves. The journey out was quite lumpy: by the time we got to the wreck, and managed to get a shot in, I was feeling decidedly worse for wear. I sat out the dive, and let David and Iain get on with it. Here is their report of the dive:

As we had boat to ourselves, the skipper asked if one of us would deal with dropping the shot. As the only diver with a smile still on my face, I volunteered to deal with it. Then I discovered that the shot was 112lbs of lead! As we were manoeuvring into position, the skipper came flying out of the wheelhouse, having realised that he had a 70+m shotline set up for a 45m dive! Fortunately, as a former Boy Scout, my rope handling and knot untying is still quite good and much to the skipper's surprise, I had the old rope off the weight before he had the new rope fixed to the buoy. Unfortunately, there was no time to coil the new line into a bucket and when we deployed the shot, a large loop of line got tangled. The shot never reached the seabed and it took both the skipper and myself to haul enough slack back into the boat to be able to set the winch up. Once recovered, I laid the line back and forward across the deck so that on our second deployment, it went away smoothly.

The shot landed just aft of Sidon's fin, upcurrent of the wreck, thus the line lay right on top of the aft deck. Spent some time in under the stern, trying to determine whether she was single or twin screwed and whether there were propeller blades still in place. These turned out to be enfroned bits of rope (?old shot lines) hanging down to the sea bed. She seems to have an unusual rudder configuration, though we really need another look at it.

We swam forward along the port hull, noting the snort mast, stowed on the after deck. On the underside of the forward hull, there are a number of 8" holes which open into what seems to be a very large space. This is presumably between outer and pressure hulls. Right up at the top was an even larger conger eel, one of many on this wreck. At the bow, we noted three torpedo tubes on each side.

On the deck, there are the remains of Sidon's radar dome, about one-third of the way back from the bow. This is flanked by two upright metal plates, which, after some puzzling, we thought were probably the bow hydroplanes in a stowed position. (This impression is confirmed by photos of the submarine - [see this photo](#).) Slightly further aft, there is a horizontal hatch in the deck, then yet further aft, the angled torpedo-loading hatch. Both of these are unfortunately closed and bolted.

The sail itself is almost intact, with a number of structures protruding; however, I was not able to identify them. The furthest aft structure looks like an almost semi-circular, 5cm thick disc, perhaps 30cm in diameter. Looking at photos of the Sidon during her active service, I suspect that this was either a periscope or a radar, but I thought that the top of it lay considerably below the other structures, unlike the photos. Perhaps it has retracted further into the wreck, or perhaps it was something extended when on the surface.

To finish the dive, we headed aft along the snort mast and deployed into a strong current. Ascent relatively uneventful, though slowed by David having problems with his sinuses. My neck seal was showing signs of following John's into "catastrophic failure mode" when I did some shutdown practice at 6m. This made the stop less than comfortable.

Then all that was left was to pack the car. It is quite a feat to fit all the kit for three trimix divers doing a full weekend into one car: I think I need to buy a trailer! We stopped off for some fish and chips, before finally leaving Weymouth around 2130 for the long drive home. All in all a great weekend, however David and I have decided we definitely need to learn to cave dive: no boats involved.