

Sound of Mull Scotland 7-14th August 2004

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Trip report by Josh Robinson

The Divers:

- Anne-Marie 'if I had a hammer' Cumberlidge
 - Robert 'wetnote conversations' Helling, being vol. 1 of *The Collected Wetnotes of Robert Helling* (forthcoming)
 - Claire 'it's always sunny next week' Kelly
 - John 'it's the trimix that does it' Kendall
 - Lisa 'jettison' Lim
 - David 'right, I'd like...' Martin
 - Ed 'crossed rabbits' Pain
 - Andy 'wetlook' Peel
 - Dan 'again' Reynolds
 - Josh 'boathook' Robinson
 - Matt '44 seconds, 50 if you count the dribbles' Worsley
 - Rosie 'Cookie Monster' Whitaker
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Those who can't be bothered to read the (supposedly) humorous descriptions of the innuendo and anecdotes that comprise a CUUEG trip can use the links below to go straight to the dives. The diving was from the MV *Peregrine* of [Lochaline Boat Charters](#), skippered by David on the first day, and then Alan and Mairie for the rest of the week. Accommodation was at [Lochaline Dive Centre](#). We highly recommend both businesses to anyone considering visiting the area. We'd brought our own supplies of helium and oxygen; air and air-tops were provided by both the Dive Centre and the compressor on the boat.

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Saturday August 7th: The Journey

Weather conditions: hot, clear, sunny

In a fit of organisation not common to CUUEG trips, 11 divers and three vehicles met at the kitstore at 0730, and even after Josh had gone home to get a spare towel for David and the directions to superstores in Glasgow that he'd left on his desk, had managed to leave by 0830, largely due to the hard work (and ruthless efficiency) of David, who had masterminded the packing of kit, shopping, and loading of the van over the previous few evenings: thanks to him and those who volunteered to help.

Others, however, were less efficient. One in particular had forgotten to send two nitrox cylinders in for testing in July, with the result that their O2-service had lapsed. So John's vehicle had to detour via Mike's: fortunately they open at 0900 on Saturdays...

The drive was relatively uneventful: having been working until stupid o'clock the night before, John was relying on caffeinated energy-drinks to stay awake, but even with this stimulant his vehicle was quite a way behind both the van and Robert's well-laden Passat, owing to the detour through Dry Drayton and the ensuing traffic encountered en route to the A14. As they stopped at Scotch Corner to top up on oil from Burger King, the other two vehicles were heading along the A66 towards Penrith.

By Glasgow, Robert was far enough ahead to pick up (and wait for) Claire, get petrol, and head up round Loch Lomond only slightly behind the van. John stopped in Glasgow to get perishables for the first half of the week, which left him with a lot of catching up to do. However, getting stuck behind a caravan on the way round Loch Lomond meant that the conditions were not ideal. But once the roads were slightly wider, he discovered that adrenaline was a much better means of staying awake than caffeine: try as it might, the gold soft-top Mercedes behind couldn't find a gap that John had not already accelerated into, tailing the well-laden Citroën as far as Glencoe.

The biggest adrenaline-hit was saved for the turn into Glencoe. Robert had rung to say that the other two vehicles were eating in Glencoe Village, but the occupants of John's car had no idea that the turn-off for this was a mile or so south of the town. John, who had just spotted an opportunity to overtake before the next wave of oncoming traffic, had his foot on the floor and was in the oncoming lane when Josh spotted the sign off to the right: a dirt-track heading towards a car-park and a restaurant, signed to Glencoe Village. 'Right here', he said, fairly urgently. John turned right. As gracefully as possible, given his speed.

After refuelling on venison casserole, haggis, steak and ale pie and other such local delicacies, the twelve headed towards the Coran Ferry, and then to Lochaline, John leading the way this time. Marshalled by David, we set about unloading the van, after which Josh was instructed to compile a chart of hot-drink preferences, such that anyone making hot drinks could know without asking who wanted tea, coffee, squash or hot chocolate. However, despite the best intentions of the system, it meant that someone making a brew in the mornings had to ascertain, for example, whether Josh had been up for more than 15 minutes (if not, tea; if so, coffee), whether Anne-Marie wanted tea or hot-chocolate, or what on earth Dan ('I'll take whatever so long as its hot, wet and tasty') might like to drink. Meanwhile, everyone with any sense was unpacking and going to bed; Josh was running around like a headless chicken in attempt to make sure that everything that was needed for the next day was available; and John and David were putting the finishing touches to the rota of chores before planning the following day's dives - which was made slightly more difficult by the fact that we were as yet unaware of the site.

Sunday August 8th

Weather conditions: changeable

Despite the (relatively) late start, an idornate amount of kit-faff was expected, so meeting was arranged at 0930. However, even this was deemed too late by several of the group for whom the idea of a lie-in on a dive-trip was clearly too much to stomach; in what must be a record for a CUUEG trip, half the participants went for a run before breakfast, in what was hoped would set a precedent for the rest of the week. As it was, it transpired that we'd managed only to make the most of about the only sunny morning we'd get.

Breakfast was followed by John's masterclass on how to fit a backplate: in considerable heat, his six disciples (or something) suited up and waved their arms around in attempt to make sure that their backplates would fit them properly. Meanwhile, others played around with hose-routings, boltsnaps, cave-line etc. etc., trying to make sure that everything was ready in time for the boat. Except Robert, who was almost fully prepared three hours before we left, and filled the time waiting for the rest of us by stitching his drysuit pockets back together.

Kit-faff at the dive-centre then turned into kit-faff on the pier as we headed down to make sure that we were ready for a quick turn-around. With his set built, Matt decided that the idea of waiting until after lunch before eating was a decidedly unappealing prospect, and wandered to the burger van. Meanwhile, Josh had drawn a different set of conclusions and suggested that we eat lunch. In another display of ruthless organisation and efficiency, David decreed the ration for each lunch: four slices of bread, two slices of plastic cheese (four for the vegetarian), two pieces of fruit, a chocolate bar and an eleventh of a packet of ham. One pedant tried to argue that it should have been a twelfth of the ham for the ten who eat both meat and cheese, with the remaining sixth going to the lactose-intolerant member of the group, but he got the maths wrong and was shamed into shutting up for at least several seconds.

The boat arrived shortly after lunch, and we were introduced to David, our skipper for the day, who was clad in what almost unpleasantly skimpy white shorts, and not much else. After a brief discussion we decided on the Shuna for the day's first dive, as the expected depth of 18m to the deck would make it suitable for the one person who needed to finish a Sports Diver qualifying dive. A nice flat sea meant that the journey out was pleasant enough even for David and John, and we kitted up with surprisingly little faff -- for the first day, at least.

Shuna

The 1426-tonne steamer sank in 1913 after running aground while seeking shelter in the Sound. She lies upright and almost intact in about 30m: a [wreck tour](#) is available from [Divernet](#).

The shot lies towards the stern, on the port side. As the first pairs descended, they were somewhat surprised to have to go significantly below 20m to get within touching-distance of the wreck, leaving the pairs with plans to stay above 25m constrained to the deck and the topmost parts of the hull. Those who ventured below were rewarded with a good look at the rudder and propellor before returning to the deck in order to see more than just the outside of the hull. Above deck-level, a few pairs explored the swim-through inside the superstructure, while John told Anne-Marie to wait where she was while he went down the flue from the boiler.

There were a few minor issues on the ascent as some people got used to the new McMahon reels: in one case the cable-tie that was supposed to stop the trigger jamming the reel managed to stop the trigger returning to un-jam it. On the surface there was general agreement

that it would be a good dive to revisit later in the week, as John in particular had spotted lots of small openings that he wanted to explore more thoroughly.

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Surprisingly, the competition for coldest person on the dive was not won by Andy, whose semi-dry suit fitted him like a glove, but a tie between John and Josh, whose drysuits were no longer worthy of the name. John had had an impressive suit-flood, while Josh began to notice water pouring in at his right wrist on the descent, and surfaced with water up to well above his knees. He eventually located a tear in his right wrist-seal, and attempted to patch it with gaffer tape for the afternoon dive, but found it a less-than-optimal solution.

Scenic Dive

For the afternoon dive we made it clear to the skipper that the priority was a site where people could find a floor (either deck or seabed) in less than 20m. This ruled out most of the scenic dives that David could suggest, since they were walls or steep slopes down to depths that to which neither John nor David wished to have to descend to retrieve a body. With this in mind, we settled on a not-very-scenic dive just off the mainland in the north part of the Sound. No one could remember a name for the site, though...

We dropped in to find a rocky bottom with a moderate amount of life. Josh and Dan found an impressive John Dory, while there were plenty of wrasse, lots of starfish (and a few purple sunstars), the occasional squat lobster lurking under the rocks, while away from the rocks, the sandy bottom was home to a few scallops, although not quite enough for them to be worth bringing back.

Once back on the boat, it became clear that Dan had been giving Josh nightmares of his 'lead a novice' dive from the DL syllabus. He started by finning away from Josh at an angle of 45° at every possible opportunity, which became particularly irritating to both when one or other had just seen something interesting in a hole. Then, on a plan to 15m, they neared the edge of a shelf at 13m. Josh signalled to Dan 'watch - depth': so Dan careered over the edge, ending up several metres below the planned depth, being glared at by Josh but without a clue as to what he'd done wrong. After four more attempts, he finally managed to look at his wrist - and fortunately, Josh had a copy of the minimum deco tables in his pocket, so it wasn't a major problem. On realising that they were both already on washing-up duty, John pointed out that the rota does not give people *carte blanche* to fuck up on the day they're already down to wash up.

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Then it started to rain. And didn't stop for much of the rest of the week, making the journey back to Lochaline somewhat damper than we'd have liked. Once back at the dive-centre, Anne-Marie prepared a fantastic dinner of sweet and sour chicken, which even managed to tempt David out of the van where he'd been blending gas for the following day's dives. Josh found a set of wrist-seals in the dive-shop, but was unable to buy any suit-repair tape, so would have to make do with gaffer tape for the next few days.

The remainder of the evening was taken up by writing up the day's dives (for those who are so inclined, at least), while Josh and Dan delayed doing the washing-up under the pretext that the rice-pans needed to soak. Others went out to the van to keep David company (or perhaps just to steal a share of the blending biscuits). John, meanwhile, took advantage of the comfortable seats in the communal area of the dive-centre to catch up on some sleep. Apparently it's the trimix that does it...



Apparently it's the trimix that does it.

Monday August 9th

Rain conditions: sporadic, light

We had arranged to meet Alan for a comparatively early start, but the curse of CUUEG kit-faff struck once again, with the result that it was half an hour later than we had expected (well, hoped) by the time we were ready to leave. Alan, however, was confident that there was a chance that we would still make slack water on the Hispania, and failing that we could head towards one of the other wrecks in that area of the Sound.

Hispania

Alan was right: we had hurried to kit up on the journey out so as to ensure that we were ready to jump in as soon as we arrived, but as it was we still had to wait for about ten minutes for the tide to begin to change. Even then we were on the early side of slack, as Josh and Claire discovered after they had had trouble getting down - they waited to be picked up by Alan, who then dropped them on the shot to find that the current had eased off considerably from when they first went in.

The wreck lists to starboard, and is covered in plumose anenomes: there is a considerable amount to enjoy even without going into the holds, as she is well-preserved, while the strong currents keep the visibility good and bring plenty of plankton for the anenomes. Again, there is a comprehensive [wreck tour](#) available from [Divernet](#). We dropped down onto the stern, and had a look around, everyone enjoying at least the fantastic view of the rudder that can be seen from the stern rail.

John and David in particular came up grinning: they had evidently enjoyed exploring a good deal of the holds, and John was particularly pleased that they had found the engine-room. Their explorational exploits were evidenced by the fact that their wings and suits had both accrued a generous coating of rust and silt. As John put it in what became something of a tag-line for the trip, 'You see, there was this hole, right - and it was a bit small...'

Josh, meanwhile, was somewhat surprised to discover that Claire's gas-consumption rocketed on moving from the 'working' to the 'resting' phase of the dive; they had turned with plenty of gas remaining, so the out-of-air signal at 6m came as something of a surprise - especially as her SPG was reading 50bar. On surfacing, playing with the venturi switch on the TX40 helped it breathe much more easily. Still, this was a very enjoyable dive for all, and one that we marked as worth revisiting later in the week.

Robert's dive was remarkable in so far as he had one buddy on the way down but two on the way up. When he and Dan had met Anne-Marie on the deck at the end of the dive, he didn't recognise her immediately and thought that maybe she was a diver from the other dive boat that had arrived at the site shortly after us. So, when she wrote "My buddy is at the surface" in my wet-notes, Robert's first reaction was "So?" and it took him a moment to realise that she wanted us to take her with us on the ascent and didn't intend to do a solo dive. The curse of reel had struck again.

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Rondo

For the afternoon dive, Alan suggested the Rondo. This 2600-tonne ship sunk in 1935, having lost her anchor while seeking refuge from a blizzard in the Sound. As can be seen from the [wreck-tour](#), she lies at an angle of about 35°, with the possibility of a good dive at almost any depth: there is plenty of life around the rudder at 6m. This was a wreck we were planning on diving later in the week in any case, as John and David wanted to come back and see what was in the bows. This dive, however, provided a good opportunity to do some reconnaissance, while the 'pick your depth' aspect of the wreck made it convenient for an afternoon bumble. A shallow thermocline had combined with mud from run-off into the sound to create a murky-looking layer on top of the sea which looked less than inviting, but underneath the water was clear, although dark.

Josh was making his second attempt at his advanced nitrox assessment, examined by both David and John, with the added complication of a variable notional MOD (they wanted to do the swimthrough under the hull at 27m, after which the bottom would revert to 25m), and the fact that he would have to receive a stage from David midway through the dive, demonstrate the gas-switch with John, then give it back to David who needed for decompression because he and John were doing the dive on 21/35. As it was a BS-AC assessment, Josh began a buddy-check, only to be told 'Josh, my kit is configured identically to yours; check that yours is working, then we'll go.' As he did so, he was thankful to John for pointing out that his hoses were routed less than optimally.

They descended relatively quickly to discover that the visibility was excellent; it was Josh's first dive with two buddies carrying cannister-lights, and he appreciated the way it made keeping sight of them quite easy. Finning under the hull at 27m, Josh began to feel slightly 'spaced', aware that he was reacting slightly more slowly than usual, and remarkably appreciative of the feeling of being weightless. When back on the surface, he suggested to John that he thought he felt a little narked; John was in no doubt that he had been. David and John followed him through the swimthrough, then they went into the (open) hull, and looked around for a bit. At about 24m, Josh checked his computer, then finned down to see what was in the bows; as he went through 26m, he remembered that his notional MOD was a metre above him. Oops.

Robert, meanwhile, was getting through pages of wetnotes playing noughts and crosses with Dan at the 6m stop, and finally proved that nitrogen narcosis exists even at 6m when he eventually managed to win a game.

From the 6m stop, John deployed a yellow DSMB as an unannounced drill; after some minutes they were surprised to see a steel cylinder floating down, attached to a wing, and less surprised to see a body in a drysuit and no fins floundering around above them. It transpired that those on-board had checked the contents of the emergency bottle and found it empty (it had previously been full of EAN50), so they had had to rig a steel cylinder instead. And that Action Dan had jumped into the water to 'help' at the earliest possible opportunity. In fairness, though, it must be said that he did succeed in making sure that the square (which had initially missed the DSMBs) was placed over them, allowing the drop-bottle to get to the divers underneath rather than drifting off.

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Dinner was something delicious cooked by Rosie involving chicken and pasta. For those who didn't want to spend the rest of the evening writing dive-logs, playing with kit (including trying to work out what had gone wrong with the drop-bottle), or planning dives and blending gas for the morning, John's DVD-collection provided ample amusement, as the trip attempted to set a record for the most episodes of Red Dwarf watched in one sitting. Meanwhile, at the blending-station in the van, David was slightly perturbed:

David: *Dan, what are you doing?*

Dan: *There's this little hole... I fiddle.*

John: *That's why we worry.*

Anne-Marie: *That's why Rosie and I lock the door at night.*



Tuesday August 10th

Rain conditions: sporadic

Today was to be the last we saw of the sun, further supporting John's claim that whenever CUUEG are in Scotland, it rains. Others pointed out that whenever *anyone's* in Scotland, it rains, while Claire put it down to the fact that it was the week before the Scottish school term was due to start: 'You should have come next week - it's always sunny next week.'

Thesis

For the morning dive, we opted for the [Thesis](#), a wreck that was very familiar to John and David from the [last CUUEG trip to Mull](#). At 500 tonnes, she is a relatively small wreck, located in the southern part of the Sound. We followed the shotline down to the bows, and began to explore. Although small, the Thesis is a very pretty wreck, covered in marine life; most pairs were keen to stay above 25m, so stuck to looking around the bow area, but Matt and Ed went further afield, while David and John went the entire length of the wreck, four times, to satisfy themselves that they really had done it to death. Meanwhile, on the ascent, Anne-Marie found herself in fits of laughter as Josh reeled his not-particularly-well-inflated DSMB down to meet them at the 6m stop.

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Breda

Alan suggested the [Breda](#) for the afternoon dive, a wreck which many of us were keen to revisit from previous trips. The 7000-tonne Dutch cargo ship lies in the Firth of Lorne, sheltered in the bay just to the north of Oban. As we approached the wreck, we were treated to a display of synchronised surface-diving by a few seals, but the prospect of exploring a large amount of metal underwater was more enticing than the possibility of swimming with them. On the wreck itself there is plenty to explore, with lots of more and less challenging swimthroughs. We saw considerable numbers of pollack and wrasse, while Josh and Dan spotted a small angler fish on the starboard rail near the stern.

With only Ed and Matt left under water, a yellow DSMB was spotted: this time, the drop-bottle was deployed without incident, and -- having seen the note attached saying 'drill again :-)' -- John sent David down with a stage to 'give them a slap'. This was followed by an animated discussion as to the merits (or lack thereof) of running drills without informing the diving officer; given the power of the latter's glare, it is perhaps not to be recommended.

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By the time we got back, the weather had cleared up enough for the more energetic members of the group to go for a swim across the loch and back -- twice, in some cases. But even here, Dan seemed intent on making sure that it wasn't a stree-free activity:

David: *Dan, stop.*

Dan: *Why?*

David: *The ferry.* [points at large ferry bearing rapidly down]

Dan: *It's alright.* [Resumes swimming accross narrow channel]

David: *It's fast.*

Dan: *We can outrun it.*

David: *No, Dan, we can't.*

Suffice it to say that Josh, who had attempted the same crossing a good couple of minutes earlier, had himself been somewhat concerned.

Swimming was then replaced by diving, with several people entering the water from the roof of the boat's cabin (something that's perhaps best only undertaken close to high water), and then attempting to climb back into the boat without using the ladder, a feat with David found considerably easier than some of the heavier swimmers.

Dinner was provided by Robert, who produced a dish known as '*Bauernfrühstück*' (farmer's breakfast), comprising potatoes, bacon, eggs, onions, butter, tomatoes and gherkins, all fried up into a delicious, artery-clogging combination. However, preparing this dish becomes an even less trivial task when the group contains one vegetarian, one person who cannot eat dairy, one who doesn't like mushrooms, and one who can't touch the sperm of the devil otherwise known as eggs without feeling sick. With the result that on the cooker there were six pans, most of which were missing a single ingredient. Even then the addition by mistake of egg to John's meal meant that some pasta was knocked up, with an improvised sauce containing lots of chili. And after the meal we all (even Dan) felt satisfyingly full.



Whilst we relaxed, David blended (and the midges were fearsome).

Wednesday August 11th

Rain conditions: light with heavy intervals

Tapti

We had hoped to be able to get out of the Sound to dive the *Tapti* at some point during the week, and the weather looked calm enough for it to be possible this morning; it was overcast and drizzly, but the wind was light enough for a longer trip out to the wreck to be possible. Much of the journey out was spent looking out for basking sharks (Alan had seen them in the same area in the previous few weeks), except when the rain became unpleasantly heavy and we took refuge in the cabin. Despite the suggestion given by the [wreck tour](#) that the wreck is easily recognisable as a complete hull, our impression was of a collection of much smaller bits of wreckage, providing shelter for considerable amounts marine life. Then again, the fact that we were in a relatively strong current meant that it was difficult to trace the lines of the wreckage in any direction other than the way we were forced. We were particularly impressed by the size of some of the crustaceans, although Robert decided that the lobster that he and Josh had spotted was too small to be worth taking (and for some reason thought that writing this on a sheet of his wetnotes would be more easier than a signal).

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Fuinary Rocks

The afternoon saw Josh and Lisa both attempting their advanced nitrox assessment for the third time, in what is considered one of the more attractive scenic dives within the Sound. The site is relatively close to the shore, in the northern part of the Sound, and comprises a series of reefs and gullies that house a range of life; however, after the range and size of the marine life seen around the *Tapti* it wasn't astoundingly beautiful, giving further ammunition to those who argue that wrecks tend to be more scenic than most 'scenic' dives. That said, an advantage of this site was the presence of quite a few clams (scallops), some of which were persuaded to join us for dinner.

A couple of minutes after Josh and John had surfaced, a yellow DSMB was spotted. Josh, who was still in his set, asked John if he wanted him to get back into the water; John, however, had other plans, and asked Josh how he would manage such a situation. He hurried out of his set to see Matt and Ed getting kitted up to go back into the water, and asked who was on-board, finally ascertaining who was there after about 10 minutes -- information which, as John pointed out later, he could have gleaned from the marshal file straightaway.

As the drop-bottle accessories were assembled, Josh was pleasantly surprised to discover that the drop-bottle was full. He clipped his own stage onto Matt to make sure that there was a second way of getting gas to the divers who had run out, the called for the boathook, which Rosie brought, and stood expectantly. Dan, meanwhile, who was running around trying to help, seemed grateful to be told to get his mask and fins on to help make sure that the square went over the yellow DSMB. He staid in the water for the rest of the exercise, helpfully ascertaining which DSMBs had divers underneath them, while Rosie stood holding the boathook.

Meanwhile, Anne-Marie was in the bows, not wanting to be disturbed. It transpired that (for the sake of the drill, in any case) she and Matt had had a dive that was deeper than planned, with an ascent that more than did justice to the word 'rapid'. Andy was assigned to keep an eye on her, while Josh became somewhat worried that Matt was back in the water.

Meanwhile, Robert and Claire surfaced, and Josh still hadn't managed to check the marshal file, which led to his failure to realise that the fact that there were eight people on the boat left only Ed, Matt, David and Lisa underwater. However, it eventually sank in that two of the three sets of DSMBs had therefore been abandoned, including the one onto which the drop-bottle had been lowered. He began to wonder what to do, but his reflection was cut short by David and Lisa surfacing, as David shouted to John 'We're ok: do you want us to have any problems for the sake of the drill?'

They were followed not long after by Matt and Ed, who had seen no one underwater. Matt seemed somewhat less sociable than usual (warmly greeting Josh with a convivial 'fuck off'), while Ed had managed to cultivate some chocolate in his mask. Lisa was assigned to looking after Matt, who duly passed out, while Ed's sinuses needed cleaning up. As this was being seen to, John called an end to the exercise. Josh certainly didn't handle it particularly well, but will learn from the experience. But we still don't know why he wanted the boathook.

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Once back in Lochaline, we unloaded the boat, bringing up the O₂-kit in case it was needed, and whatever other kit needed playing with. Ed's contingency plan, however, seemed to plan for the most implausible eventuality, as he began to unload the drop-bottle:

Josh: Why are you bringing the drop-bottle?

Ed: In case we need it up at the Dive Centre

Yes, he thought that someone might run out of deco-gas at a depth of several metres above sea level

The weather was good enough for another swim, after which John taught Josh how to entice scallops out of their shells, which were then fried in garlic and butter. Meanwhile, Rosie cooked enough bangers and mash to feed a small army, which were then happily devoured.



Josh entices scallops to come out of their shells whilst Rosie started the sausages.

Thursday August 12th

Rain conditions: heavy

Rondo

For John and David, this was the big one. Three years after Iain and John had attempted to dive the bottom of the *Rondo* on air, John and David had come back with a more appropriate gas-mix (18/45), and stages of EAN50 and O₂. Given John's [previous experiences](#) with this wreck, he wasn't taking any chances (and certainly wasn't going to leave it until the following day, lest the dive succumb to the joint perils of Friday 13th and the 'last day fuck-up'); David, meanwhile, raised considerable laughter by pretending to swerve off the road in the manner of a previous driver.

As it was, the dive was relatively uneventful. John and David discovered that there was remarkably little to see in the bows of the wreck, the highlight of the dive being the deeper of the two 'swim'-throughs, which involved a very tight squeeze. The others were paired up by experience, so each pair could pick their depth. Matt and Ed decided not to attempt to squeeze through the same hole that John and David had found, but like most pairs, took the opportunity to squm under the hull at 27m. Robert used another page of wetnotes to point out to Josh that they had 2 minutes to get to their scheduled arrival at 20m -- the ability to write underwater seems to be a novelty that hasn't worn off. However, we were all satisfied that the top twenty metres of the wreck were by far the most scenic -- and even then, most of us had had enough of the sight of the rudder by the time we reached got to the 6m stop, drifting off the wreck for the final decompression.

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Scenic Dive

For the afternoon dive, Alan had promised us a good scenic dive with plenty of shellfish; it didn't disappoint. Beforehand, however, John and David needed to blow off and airtop their trimix to avoid a punishing decompression-schedule: a short game of helioke took their cylinders down to the required pressure, but something felt wrong about adding air in order to *decrease* a decompression-requirement.

Josh and Lisa were both attempting the advanced nitrox assessment for the fourth time, but first there was the small matter of finding a starter for dinner. Josh and John both discovered the disadvantages of fingerless gloves for such a dive: collecting clawed shellfish using only the blade of a knife did not prove the easiest task they've carried out underwater, despite the accompaniment of the Cat's song 'I'm gonna get you little fishy' from Red Dwarf, sung through a regulator; in the end they came up with a solitary squat lobster, which was itself short of a claw. Meanwhile, Matt was taking advantage of his strong gloves to grab the creatures and put them into a carrier bag; suffice it to say that his catch was somewhat larger.

And despite the fact that Lisa ditched yet another DSMB, she and Josh both passed their assessments, at the fourth time of asking.

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Once back at the dive centre, John attempted to make the afternoon's catch into a soup. With the help of Robert, he extracted incredible quantities of meat from five small squat lobsters, but still found that the soup a little short of bulk, even with the flavour produced by adding the stock from cooking the squatties. So into the mix went a bottle of white wine, and the two tins of peas that had come on the two previous CUUEG trips, and returned unopened: this left it looking like fish-stock with peas and bits of squat lobster. Fortunately, there was a hand-blender in the kitchen, which transformed this slightly bizarre combination of ingredients into a very good soup.

And during the main course, those previously unfamiliar with the custom were initiated into the tradition of John's chili, although not until David had given a health-and-safety lecture on the dangers of treating this substance with insufficient respect. For those who have not experienced this particular culinary delight, it comes in three parts: one meat and one vegetable, both 'lightly spiced', and a separate saucepan of 'hot sauce', a legendary substance which in excessive quantities has been known to make a plate of meat inedible for people of sensitive taste buds. As it happened, it was impossible to obtain fresh chilis in Lochaline, which made the sauce slightly less potent than usual; the meal still packed quite a punch, though, and left a few over-adventurous diners congregating around the tap.



That unusual bright stuff is sunshine (putting in an early appearance before next week).

Rain conditions: heavy

Given a choice of wrecks to revisit on the last day, the *Breda*, the *Hispania*, the *Shuna* and the *Thesis* were all mentioned. Neither John nor David was keen on the *Thesis*, as they felt they had seen more than enough on their previous visits to the wreck. The *Hispania* was a popular choice, but this meant that the *Breda* would be too far away for a second dive, leaving us to revisit the *Shuna*; this also proved popular, since most people had surfaced from the first dive of the week with the sentiment that there was a lot more left to see.

But before we could dive, there was the small matter of saying goodbye to Rosie. In a display of what can only be called utter muppetry, she had booked a plane ticket to Finland for a day too early, leaving her to make her own way back to London from a relatively remote part of the west coast of Scotland. She was booked on an overnight sleeper from Glasgow, which left the best part of a day to get from Lochaline to Glasgow: fortunately, the combination of a ferry from Lochaline onto Mull, a bus across the island, another ferry to Oban and then a train were able to get here there, well in time for the train. We waved goodbye, then set off for the dive, disappointed to be deprived of a supply of biscuits. And of Rosie's company.

Hispania

Josh and Matt were planning on taking of advantage of the relatively shallow bottom on the *Hispania* to dive a stronger mix on the first dive, allowing them an increased no-decompression time. However, as they logged their plan with John, they were surprised to be asked if they'd done gas-calculations. Matt pointed out to John that he didn't usually demand gas-calculations. 'It's Friday the thirteenth, and the last day of the trip,' replied John; 'I want to see figures for the dive before you go in.'

The figures were duly worked out, and we went for a dive. John and David went back to the passage they had been investigating earlier in the week, only to find to their disappointment that it didn't go much further than they'd got that time. Meanwhile, Matt and Josh came up grinning, having explored a considerable number of holds, and found a large Conger in the engine room.

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Shuna

On revisiting the *Shuna*, we had more realistic plans of the depth that would be required to see the huge propellor and rudder, with its white and yellow daisy anemones, as well as spending more time looking around the rest of the wreck. Matt and Josh found another Conger, this time a long way down a pipe; it wasn't until they had dropped a starfish on its head that they were completely sure what it was. Once they had reached the bows, towards the end of the dive, they encountered another form of underwater-life: after seeing David squeeze through a hole that they had deemed to small to think about venturing into in twinsets and stages, they watched John attempt to follow him, before he decided that the gap was just too small.

On leaving the wreck and reaching the 21m stop, they had a minor issue with the planned gas-switch. Josh carried out the switch, but once Matt had turned on his stage, and started breathing from it, it started to free-flow, continuing until he returned to his backgas and turned off the stage. For someone who is not renowned for spending more money than he has to, watching the valuable 50% escape was like seeing pound coins flowing from the regulator. They completed their stops, and ascended

That aside, the trip seemed to have avoided a last-day incident. At least, it seemed that way until the exchange of emails requesting details for the trip-report, when Robert revealed that he and Ed evidently hadn't remembered what happened on the [last day of the previous trip to Mull](#):

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I learnt that if you intend to do a dive according to the computer it
is advisable to make sure your buddy understands the display of that
device when you show it to him. Otherwise ascend times can take a bit
longer than originally intended. Furthermore, if the computer wants to
decompress at 3m, it doesn't particularly like to do that at 6m, a
fact I had known earlier but which was brought to my attention again
during this dive.
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Apparently an 'I'm going into deco' signal had been misinterpreted as a signal showing the amount of gas that Robert had remaining. Fortunately, they were only 5-10 minutes over time, and because they had been one of the first pairs into the water, no one had noticed that they were late.

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For the evening's entertainment, we had booked a table at the White House, the restaurant just down the road from the dive centre, as the hotel had told us that we could only make a booking if it was for three separate tables of four, and that we would all have to eat at different times. The food in the restaurant was quite pricey, but locally sourced and very good: the Lochaline prawns in particular were memorable, as no one was quite expecting to be armed with a nutcracker and come face to face (literally) with a collection of large prawns, in their shells. Fortunately, there was plenty of guidance available. As well as a finger-bowl.

Satisfied after a good meal, we headed back up to the hill to enjoy some wine and whisky. Jo- I mean, Mr Kendall -- was particularly pleased that he had managed to get CUUEG to play a dr- I mean, imbibing -- game, even if it did take Mr Pain quite a while to get the hang of 'Bunnies'; suffice it to say that he was feeling somewhat under the weather the next morning.

As we ran out of alcohol, it seemed a good idea to head down to the social club to meet Alan for a drink. However, we hadn't quite grasped

the fact that all sensible people were in bed by this point, and discovered that he had left a while ago. Still, we managed to find another drink, before Da- Mr Martin -- decided that he wanted to go for a swim. Which he duly did, and after which people seemed to decide that going to bed would be a good idea.



Back: Claire, Josh, John, Rosie, David, Andy, Robert, Matt and Ed.
Front: Dan, Ann-Marie and Lisa.

Saturday August 14th

Rain conditions: photonic

With considerable hangovers, the 11 remaining divers got up. At rather different times: Robert had decided to attempt to get back to Cambridge in time to go to the theatre that evening, so he left at some stupid hour of the night, dropping Claire in Glasgow, Andy in Penrith and then having to put up with Dan for the rest of the journey back to Cambridge.

John's planned departure time for the second wave was 0830. However, Robert, Claire, Andy and Dan were long past the Coran Ferry by the time Josh started cooking breakfast, and once we had ascertained the fry-upability of the remaining food, plans were altered slightly. Large amounts of meat were fried in preparation for the journey ahead, and the smell of bacon, sausages, haggis, potatoes, mushrooms and tomatoes wafted through the dive centre as people began to get up and think about leaving. Anne-Marie insisted on stealing some food, rather than being given it (for some reason she said it tasted better when it was stolen), while the rest, despite heavy hangovers, managed to force some down before leaving.

The long queue for the ferry was followed by a long wait while a wrecked car was recovered from the road leading back to Loch Lomond. After which John decided that he needed to wake himself up again: David, driving the van, had four caravans behind him, and four caravans in front of him; he was thus rather surprised to see the blurred figure of a dark estate car zoom past on the other side of the road. As it happened, John had seen through a gap in the trees that the road was clear for about half a mile. So he decided to have some fun, dropping a couple of gears and flooring it.

Josh didn't learn. At the beginning of the M6, he was stupid enough to point out, having seen the speedo needle hovering at a relatively high speed, that it didn't feel as if they were going *that* quickly. Then he realised what he'd said, as John rose to the challenge. Suffice it to say that the occupants of his car now have a better idea as to what it can do, even when relatively fully laden. On sorting out the accounts, David was not hugely surprised to discover that Robert had used two thirds as much fuel as John, despite having covered the same mileage.

After a couple of food stops (at one of which Matt managed to break a record that had been heard on the radio earlier on the journey, but only by including every last dribble), the two vehicles returned to Cambridge. The van was unloaded in preparation for the day of work that lay ahead in the kitstore, reconcreting the floor. All in all, it was a successful and enjoyable trip: everyone's diving had improved considerably, and all were looking forward to the next trip